

THE  
CUCKOO

*By the same Author*

THE HOOLIGAN

RUDOLF NASSAUER

★  
THE  
CUCKOO  
★

P I I R O V E N



PETER OWEN LIMITED  
59 Old Brompton Road London SW7

*Printed in Great Britain by*  
**JOHN BUCKLE (PRINTERS) LIMITED**  
*Theatre Plain Great Yarmouth Norfolk*



## I

I have a very disorderly mind, and at present I find it imperative to put everything down on paper. In my business, whereas before I had never to keep a diary for appointments and the things I had to do, I have to refer constantly to notes I have made the previous day in order to accomplish my daily tasks. A few grey hairs on my head have been pointed out to me, but they are at the back. I hadn't seen them myself until X pulled them out, singly of course, and laughed. Perhaps age is dimming my light, throwing the first muslin over my eyes. That's how it feels, the first numbing of my mind, and I am not as constantly afraid of death any more. I know that this muslin will get finer and finer, more and more blinding, until it becomes the cloth of my shroud. Be that as it may, I find it necessary to commit myself to paper if I want any clarity whatever. My eyes too, have not been so good lately, and having been aware of this for about four years, I have at last gone to the oculist to order some glasses. Ultimately, one does not allow one's vanity to gain the upper hand. In fact, I have found nothing as exciting these last four years as the prospect of getting these wretched glasses. I haven't seen the real outline of anything these past four years, and soon, simply by putting these lenses in front of my eyes, I will begin to see again everything I look at.

My mind, I suppose, has always been disorderly, and I have liked it that way. Disorderliness of mind is conducive to dreaming. It is evocative for the imagination, for nothing is ever final in one's thoughts, and this leads one to search further. There are many reasons why my mind is like that, the most important of which is the serious operation on my ears which the surgeons performed when

I was nine months old. But, quite frankly, I'm not too interested in reasons for my state of mind. I'm not too interested in the examination of man which ultimately leaves him with only the raw-material of his flesh. I like that which makes men cheat each other and love one another. I like the form into which they grow, the patterns of their mind, which reveal them when eventually they have been driven to the point when they can transform no more. Then, by God, you can judge a man. But it is only lately I have discovered this, as I shall presently proceed to describe.

But before doing so, let me say this: I hate to judge others because I do not trust myself. Three years ago, my brother-in-law, my late wife's brother, seduced A. I had had a flirtatious relationship with A. for several years, and once or twice we had been intimate. But when this happened, I felt suddenly that I loved A., until the grotesque battle was over and I had won her back. Had no one interfered, this inoffensive affair would have gone on for a long time. But now it died, as for a moment I had been forced to expect too much from it. Circumstances had twisted my judgement, and I had declared my love for her, which a few weeks later meant nothing to me. I am not a suspicious person. In fact, I trust everybody, and I cannot even complain of having been abused because of this. Only once, in fact, by someone who was of very great importance in my life. But even then it was no one's fault. A man who trusts everybody should not marry at twenty-three. Ten years ago, this wouldn't have made any sense to me, and therefore to say it now, is to abuse the past. No. I must learn to judge others, the rest is *my* life. That *you* can judge as you will.

The purpose behind my will to judge others is quite simple. I have to decide whether or not to kill Aaron Lawkes. There is no question whether or not I have the right to kill him. I have. About that, I am quite certain. But I have not yet made up my mind.

## II

Aaron Fawkes Jr came into our life four years ago in June. In fact it was a few months earlier, even, though he didn't come to live with us until the end of June. I remember that when I came back from Scotland he was installed in our house, rooming there until he could find somewhere else. We'd seen him knock around for a few months, with a writer whose work I admired but whom I did not then know, though he had a room only two doors away from us. Aaron Fawkes lived opposite him, but I didn't know that until I first spoke to him in the Café. Later I was not surprised that he had lived there. Our house—the house where Klein lived, and the house opposite where Fawkes roomed, formed a triangle. In London, though, you haven't the faintest idea who your neighbours are. That's life in London. You don't want to know because the problems of physical life are so easy, and the real problems of life so vast, that you cannot get away with showing a little interest in the man or woman next door. And before showing more than a little interest in people you become choosy. One's attitude to time, too, is quite different in London to what it is in the country. In the country the seasons are pertinently demarcated by the vegetation of the fields and woods; sunrise and sunset set off and close the day. In London one watches the clock, and the passing of time is more terrible. In our house we have a number of clocks which don't work because they're not made to. Now and again, when it's important to get up early to go somewhere, one of these is set, and then allowed to run itself to a stop. Only the cuckoo clock in the children's room is kept going. I don't wonder why. It's because this wretched cuckoo jumps out of its house every quarter of an hour, so that one thinks

one knows the time. But one doesn't even look at the time. The cuckoo, in fact, makes one blind to time. These clocks are the most charming in the world.

Just as one doesn't notice one's neighbours and as we did not notice the time, we did not for some while notice Aaron Fawkes. We went to the Cafe every night at about ten o'clock and he was always there, in the same place, eating and reading at the same time. Quite often Klein used to come in a little later and sit with him, whilst Ria and I sat either by ourselves or with friends. There are perhaps twenty people who for years have gone to this Cafe regularly every night to sip the last cup of the day. I know them all by sight but I have hardly spoken to any of them. One man, a Dr. Jarau, I once met in Limone sul Garda. He told me then that he had been a judge in Germany and he told me the story of his escape from the Nazis in 1939. It was quite interesting. But back in London we only greeted each other a little more cordially than before. I never talked to him again. He doesn't come to the Cafe any more and I imagine he has died. These people are like one's distant relatives. One knows of them, but one doesn't know them.

We didn't really take any notice of Aaron Fawkes until one night when he came to the Cafe wearing one of those grey Bavarian jackets decorated with green oak leaves and ram's horn buttons. That day he still wore long trousers, but the next evening, to appear even more conspicuous, he wore leather jerkins. Later on when we became acquainted, he amused us very much by telling us of the special clothes a woman he knew kept in her wardrobe, which she wore only when trying to catch a new man.

'Those are her *Jagd Kleider*' She has a special set of hunting clothes' he told us.

We heard him talk German to Klein. In our Cafe a lot of people talk German. A lot of Jewish refugees live in our district. But no Jewish refugee would ever wear a Bavarian jacket and leather jerkins. So who was this man?

He had aroused our curiosity. The hunt was on. Sooner or later one of us would be tracked down, and fall victim to our curiosity. And the same went for him too. I noticed him looking more and more frequently at us, and sometimes I even imagined that he smiled at us. Perhaps he wanted us to talk first. He obviously didn't know the rules of our Café, which are as conventional as those of a London club. You go to these places to be distracted from your own loneliness by the loneliness of others.

I don't remember now whether he or we started the move to sit closer to each other. I should think it was Ria. All I remember is that I had liked Lawkes better in the distance. That might have had something to do with my eyes and with my temperament. I like people to be what I imagine them to be. They often drain my concept of them when I look closer or when they start speaking. It's not surprising that the conventional time for love is the night. He had looked younger in the distance, taller, and his hair thicker. He was actually very short, and quite slight of build. His hair was dark, and his face rather fascinating about the mouth. There was something the matter with his mouth. I now saw it was his teeth. They were dark brown. That's why he hid them when he laughed. They looked soft, like pieces of wood in the river. His gums were grey and sore. His mouth was like a wound.

There is something very strange I've noticed about women who have sisters. They've all got a particular kind of crudeness. They're a shade more crude than other women. They talk about a man 'melting their bowels', or they use phrases such as 'I wouldn't mind having his shoes under my bed'. The very idea of a man's shoes and bed linked in one amorous phrase is disgusting and typical of these women. Yet they get by because of the strange innocence in their eyes. I have imagined all the women I know as children. When they have sisters I imagine two little girls, passing through all the stages of their

awkward growth confiding in each other. These women are in fact more sisterly towards other people, because they have experience in living together. Also, by pooling their experience they grow wiser more quickly. Perhaps I feel this more strongly because I have no brothers. All I know is this: if Aaron Lawkes had been a woman, with those teeth, I would have run a mile rather than have talked to her at close quarters. Either Ria didn't notice them or they didn't matter to her. She didn't even mention his ugly teeth to me. I'm sure that had something to do with her sister Bella, though there is another explanation stemming from the same root. Sisters are invariably more slutish than other women. It has to do with the sharing of clothes. The younger ones get the leftovers, and later on they share wardrobes. And probably they remember the time in their childhood when smells were fascinating and therefore not terrible. How else could Ria have contemplated getting close to that mouth which even from a distance looked like a forbidding fountain of stench?

One night a tall lean Englishman with a duty rain coat and a load of books under his arm came in and sat down to supper with Aaron. He looked very much like an ostrich academic in a desert of books. I only mention this man because through him we discovered that Aaron Lawkes was in America. It was the first time we'd heard him speak English at close quarters. I suppose this was an important discovery for Ria. Love needs language, and sensing the immense obstacles in her way since she was a married woman, Ria must at least have been a little comforted by hearing that the obstacles were not further increased by a foreign language.

By about April of that year I got involved in the situation. For the first time I talked to Klein. Although we had seen each other scores of times, we had never met. We were both at a poetry reading I had gone to with A. After the performance a mutual friend introduced me

to Klein. He was, I knew, interested in a subject I was at the time trying to write about. I had about four chapters finished, and we discussed these. He agreed to look at my work, not at once, but in six weeks' time. Klein is a castle of a man. He has to have a moat about him, and the drawbridge only comes down on special occasions.

I am sure that Aaron Fawkes, to whom this meeting must have been reported, was delighted at this development. Now, next time Klein came to the Café and we were also there, we might all sit together and at last become acquainted. Ria, too, must have been pleased for the same reason. What I do know is that neither Klein nor I had contrived to meet that evening through our mutual friend, to get Ria and me closer to Aaron Fawkes. In fact he didn't enter my mind that night. He might have entered Klein's. He and Klein had a close relationship.

I didn't see Klein for six weeks after this first meeting. He then telephoned, and said he now had time to read my manuscript, and one night he came into the house to collect it. I forget whether or not Ria met him that night for the first time. Perhaps she wasn't there for the five minutes Klein spent in the house. He was in a hurry. In the beginning he was always in a hurry. Or rather, he gave one the feeling that he didn't stay anywhere for long except at his desk. Before he got up from his desk he put on a moustache and his big glasses. Now that I think of these two features of his, I remember the first impression I had of them. His eyesight obviously is worn out because of the thousands of books he has read, but even if Klein didn't have a genuine need for spectacles, I feel he would wear them all the same. His glasses remove him a little, like a shield removes the body of a warrior. And his moustache is merely an extension of this remove.

During the next few weeks Klein caused me ridiculous

pleasure through Aaron Fawkes. Fawkes continued coming to the Café as before. I noticed that Klein didn't come in any more, which considerably lessened my nervousness. (Later on he told me that, from time to time, in order to maintain isolation, he changes all the places of his habits). What was so amusing was the way Fawkes imparted to me Klein's approval of my manuscript. For some time it was his stare, which made you imagine, or rather, look for, a constant nodding of his head as a sign of approval. After that it was the vague cold smile on his sallow face which indicated to me that he was now familiar with the gruesome subject I was writing about. And after that, the most amusing period of this telepathic mime, he nodded with his whole body, at times there was a broad smile on his face. Quickly, if he saw that one had noticed him, he would draw his top lip over his ugly teeth, and look shyly downwards. There was a flattering elegance about this gesture, but at the same time there was an ingratiating arrogance about the man. What right, I thought, had he to know more about me than I about him? At the same time, of course, I felt pleased and flattered about what I imagined was Klein's 'approval'. Ria, now I think back, behaved quite unlike herself during that time. The usual forthright, direct and crude manner was lacking. She was not shy, and had often talked to strangers, such as the barrel organist in town one night. She had on a red dress that night. We had had a meal and were on our way home. Suddenly she left my side, and a moment later she was turning the handle of the barrel organ, and the monkey jumped on her shoulders. She looked incredibly beautiful, with her pitch black hair and her red dress and the monkey on her shoulder with the red ribbon round its neck. She was laughing and singing with the music. Her eyes were shining, she looked ferocious and wild like an animal released from a cage. Once or twice more I have seen that look in her eyes.

During those weeks leading up to June four years ago,



Ria was quite unlike herself. And Fawkes' mime made him behave like a bird. I suppose the bird best fitting the description is a cuckoo. The monotonous coo of the Harbinger of Spring was replaced by his ridiculous gestures. And just as I associate a cuckoo with distance, because I have never seen the bird, so these distant gestures of Fawkes' reminded me of one. Also, in an untidy mind like mine, something of all birds comes together in any bird I imagine. Fawkes was shifting, like a sparrow shifts cheekily in all directions before it takes courage to pick up the crumb. He continuously changed the posture of his head and beak, which gave me the same sense of mystery I have when, looking at animals, I try to fathom out their thoughts and feelings. And Ria, strangely enough, was much the same. The preamble to love is very much like two birds coming together to swive. There is a lot of hovering about, getting the ground right, positioning. I have never noticed this in myself, nor in the women whom I have loved. But some of the interesting things about life one only notices in others.

### III

At the end of May four years ago, Klein rang me and said he had now read my manuscript. He summoned me to his place a few days later. His room two houses away from ours is right at the top, the same shape exactly as our bedroom. He lives elsewhere too. Klein has several homes. As I've said, from time to time he needs to change the places of his habits, and that includes the place where he lives. His room was lined with books, in fact with so many that I was a bit overcrowded. I am overcrowded fairly easily by any great accumulation, whether it be of water, money or books. There were two desks, one an imposing writing desk with an antique chair in front, and the other a fairly plain wooden table, with a hard backed chair. By now, of course, you can readily understand that Klein has to have several desks for work. There were pleasant lamps on both of them. But one of the most conspicuous features of the place were the rows of sharpened pencils which lay on each desk. These coloured wooden pencils with their leads sharp as pins looked soldierly in order, alert, and stupid. There was nothing they would do without command. They couldn't even run away, as I particularly noticed that there wasn't a round one among them. These hexagonal slaves looked really terrifying. Not far away lay the sharpeners, the sadistic sergeant-majors or overseers. At any moment one must beware of death. The fact that matter can neither be created nor destroyed, and that as a result of this I might one day be put of such a pencil terrified me.

I sat down on the low armchair by the side of the plain wooden table and Klein sat on the hard backed chair. He said he preferred hard chairs. He made a point of his preference several times, and in the end I knew his

preference was an excuse. Hard chairs are invariably higher than soft chairs. Short people usually prefer to sit on them.

I had been right about Fawkes. Klein liked my work. He was generous in his praise, and over-generous in his appreciation. He had read what I had written at least three times, and he understood every tiny nuance. And it wasn't a question of Klein imparting to me that he had found this easy, inasmuch as he could easily think himself into my mind, and re-experience the actual writing of the book as he read it. To know someone you need to know more about that person than you need to know. You need to know the whole life of a person, all the rubbish as well as the good things of that life. From it all emerges the form of that person, and to know someone that well you need to be generous, over-generous, in your knowledge of that person. We talked until well past five in the morning, about all manner of things, and at some stage I remember that he told me about his friend with the Bavarian jacket 'That was my first information about Fawkes, and I don't now remember every word of it. I've said that I was overawed by the great number of books which lined the walls. When I'm overawed I am too preoccupied with atmosphere to listen to and to take in every detail. At the end of every day all sorts of things have slipped past me because I have been too much occupied meantime with others. Important things, too, as when Klein first told me about Fawkes. I remember some of the things he said, but not how he said them. I mention this particularly as Klein matters a great deal to me. It's the mood of his first words about Fawkes which I don't remember.

'Do you like him?' he asked. 'He likes you very much'. I am weak to flattery. I am baffled by clever talk. And then I say things I don't really mean at all.

'I like him. He looks alright'.

There was I being clever in an absurd way. I wanted

to be liked by Klein because I liked Klein. Therefore I had to pretend that I liked Lawkes because he liked Lawkes. I wasn't even being dishonest, because I felt that Klein would see that if I said I liked Lawkes this had nothing to do with my like or dislike of Lawkes.

'He's an American, from Boston. He comes from a rich family out there, a very old family. He works for a Gramophone Company. He's very interested in music. He was a friend of E's. He was in love with her. Klein told me

E was a writer and I'd read two of the three books she had written. I'd met her once or twice a few years ago. She was much older than myself. She had a great reputation, for two reasons. She was a very gifted writer, and she was Klein's pupil. That's how it was generally accepted. She was also Klein's mistress. That, too, was accepted. And naturally, in a society where even those who pretend not to care about social laws care about social laws, there were rumours about this relationship as there is steam from a hot cup of tea.

Rumour had it that Klein was a demon, that he was terribly strict with her, that she feared him. She was the heroine who had conquered the heart of a genius, and because of that, no doubt she would become part of history. E had died on Good Friday the previous year. That too was known. But the entry of Lawkes into the hall of fame was completely new to me.

'He was very good to her during her illness. He was wonderful,' Klein told me. 'He did everything a man can do, sold part of his inheritance so that he could get her the best medical attention. He stayed with her day and night, and he watched her die. There was nothing one could do. It was incurable.'

'Did she know that she was dying?' I asked. 'I am always curious to know how people die.'

'No,' Klein answered.

'And did he give her hope?'

'Yes, he did,' Klein said.

It is wonderful how some people react to sickness and to death. The majority of people are wonderful to the sick and the dying, especially to the dying. They administer comforting words which make it easier for the unfortunate to depart from this world. I was once cheated as a boy. Someone in whose charge I was took me to a hospital in Appenzell, where I was spending the summer. He said I had been bitten behind the ear by an insect, and that they would simply put some ointment on to relieve the pain. My ears were full of pain, which made my mind, not dizzy, but quite clear, so that I was aware of all my surroundings, every word spoken, and dependent on the truth of things so that I could cope with my pain. To reason is great medicine. I had an operation that day, and the lie of that man haunts me to this day. I want the truth about me when I die, because dying is the last important step of one's life.

It is also true that when a tragedy befalls a man, he can reveal himself. That's what the dying do to the survivors, or the survivor to the hurt party of broken love. I know a fair amount about this now, but it does not come at this juncture of the story. Later, now I've had two deaths to learn from. I will come back to it.

#### IV

When I went home in the early hours of the morning after my first long talk with Klein, Ria was asleep. I watched her for some time before I undressed to go to bed. I had arranged to wake her at whatever hour I'd come in to tell her of Klein's reaction to my work. I was going to, but first I indulged in watching her sleep. Her left arm was lying uncovered outside the blankets, and her hand was lying still except for her thumb which was pointing away from her hand and which even in sleep I saw move very slightly as if it were breathing. But most beguiling of all was her mouth. When asleep she pouched her lips and the lower one expressed the mood of sweet sulking, like a child's. Sad children are the most beautiful sight in the world.

Her clothes were strewn all over the place. Her coloured skirt was lying in a circle on the floor, deflated like a collapsed Chinese lantern. Beneath it suspected was one shoe. The other shoe fallen over on its side was half way between the wash basin and the skirt. The rest of her clothes were lying on the edge of the bed. Her black eyebrows looked soft and shiny like the wings of a moth.

The creaking of the springs woke her as soon as I got into bed. Although I had agreed to wake her I didn't want to because it meant smoking another cigarette with her and going to sleep an hour later. I wasn't tired, but I have always known how to go to sleep quickly. I wanted to get some sleep before morning.

'What's the time?' she asked.

'Quarter past four', I said.

I was lying. It was just on six by my watch, and I wanted her to go back to sleep and not to say in the

morning that she'd been woken early and couldn't get back to sleep. It was light, else I would have put the clock back even further. She had no idea of time.

She murmured something very faintly, which I pretended not to hear, so that she would have to repeat it if she was interested in the answer. She repeated the question in a grumpy and angry voice.

'What did he say?' she asked.

'He liked it very much indeed.'

'Good' she said, and came closer to me. She didn't want to know any more.

Of course, you will say, you have to make allowances. You wake someone who has been asleep for three quarters of the night, and you expect her to be alert the moment she wakes up. I didn't expect her to say anything. But if she did say something then I expected real interest and the right emphasis. Before we were married she had once told me that I was more important than my work. I still remember the shock that passed through me when she said this and perhaps, I should have paid more attention to this shock.

I was full of rage. I now lay beside her and removed her arm from my waist. I get spasms of uncontrollable hatred. Nowadays they are not so violent but at one time I was afraid that one day I might kill someone. Rage drowns everything that is against it. You use the most tender secrets of the past and turn them into insults and abuses. It's the adrenal gland of the spirit that makes one do these vile things. The rage rushes through your body, you keep still for a moment and within that terrifying moment all the peaceful solutions to your anger desert you, you become strong and invincible and attack by the most painful methods. If you are lucky and can outlast that vulnerable moment before violence you can save yourself. It is a great help if you can quickly become aware of the different size and weight of the enemy. But often this awareness has not helped me with Ria. Women

are apt to take one's rage as a sign of passion. I have no idea whether or not they are right in this. But I do know that after violence there was always infinite peace between us, and when the rage was controlled the worm ate further into our love. That night, I recall quite clearly, my rage was saved by remembering that she had been sleeping for a long time, and was therefore not responsible for her disinterest. I know I did not accept this as an excuse, but my rage did. Some years ago, when our sweet eldest child, now nine, was six months old, I was playing with her on the bed one morning, and she had been laughing as I had made her bob up and down on the mattress. Suddenly, owing, I suppose, to some carelessness on my part, she hit her head on the bedpost. She was dumbfounded for a moment, and then she began to scream. She was not hurt. Ria had seen what had happened, and she called me a sadist. She said something like 'you should never have become a father', and she was drawing me on until my blood began to boil. Later on she said she was only teasing, but I was so angry that I didn't notice this and took her seriously. Nothing happened until she came over to the bed to put a fresh napkin on the baby. Whilst she did this she let fly another remark against me: 'You deserve a better father', she said to the child. For a moment I stood quite motionless, then suddenly I burst out and hit her on the neck. I know that you can kill rabbits by hitting them on the neck. But at that moment I didn't realise, or have time to reflect, that the neck is a dangerous spot. She fell over, and her eyes convulsed. The baby looked on calmly, perhaps slightly frightened, whilst I became filled with terrible fear. I had suddenly woken up from this coma of rage, and ran to the bathroom to fetch water and a flannel. For some time I was full of anguish and then, slowly Ria regained her composure. The worst was to follow. She said with a terrible fear that this might happen again, that I would murder her, and her talk branded me as a potential murderer. My





rages are not as frequent anymore, but when I get them I still am frightened of them. Only to become wiser will help me. Only wisdom can kill the desire for revenge.

The next morning Ria asked me in detail what Klein had said. I told her everything, including the little I had learnt about Fawkes.

## V

It was now quite clear that next time we saw Lukes in the Cafe we would talk to him. We were always on the look out for new friends especially Ria. To have a lot of friends provides a measure of safety to a turbulent marriage. It's a first aid to insecurity. Ria, though very strong had an instinctive feeling for insecurity. All the doors of our house have no keys. They were there when we moved in but gradually they have disappeared. The same with cupboards and desks. There is not one place in the house where one can keep a secret. When Ria went to bed before I did she always kept the door open. And in a most simple way this feeling of insecurity has been transferred to the children. When they first had their own room the door was kept open so that Ria could hear them better when they cried. Now they too keep their door open at night.

This feeling of instinctive insecurity was a very important key to Ria's character. It was this which later on caused the complete abnegation of privacy from our life so that every detail became known to the public she had created out of our friends. However terrible this process of her life was which was to drag her down with the force of a whirlpool it was in keeping with her character. She had integrity.

One night we went to the Cafe a little earlier than usual. We were both in a state of excitement. When something which one knows is going to happen is in any way related to pleasure one becomes excited. In this state of anticipation one is invariably at the point of most acute sensibility so that one plays one's senses to their full power of enjoyment. One leaves the best morsel till last and tries to make oneself late for a person one

looks forward to meeting with great joy. Ria and I went for a walk before going to the Café that evening, with the result of our arriving instead of later, earlier than usual. The friend we were seeking, however, was already in his usual place. I noticed at once that he had not yet started to eat, and felt pleased at this as it showed that our little walk of diversion had not been in vain.

'He's only just got here', I said to Ria.

'What shall we do?' she enquired.

It was up to me to make the approach to him, and I went straight up to his table. Ria followed me. I can plan actions very well, but always get lost when I start speaking. I've never been able to overcome this. Even now, except with one or two people, I am still clumsy in my speech.

'You are Aaron Fawkes. Klein has told me about you'.

'Yeah. He's told me about you too. Sit down', he said, half rising from his chair. He said an extra 'how d'you do' to Ria before sitting down again.

He had a charming smile, a smile of real kindness, such as one sometimes finds in older women whose life has been nicely fulfilled by a happy marriage, money and children. The only difference was that Aaron's smile had something shy about it, which one didn't notice after a while.

'We've seen you about for a long time, and we couldn't make out what nationality you were. It's that Bavarian jacket you wear. But you're American, Klein says'.

'Yeah, sure', he said. A moment later he asked: 'Have you eaten?'

'No. Not yet'.

'What'll you have?' he asked. He passed Ria the menu.

Ria gave me a short look of astonishment, and smiled a little. I could see that Fawkes was very sensitive to people's reactions, for as Ria smiled he played with his lips, as some people do to hide that they are being hurt. In fact Ria had smiled because I had told a blatant lie.

We had eaten an hour ago. But Fawkes thought she was smiling at something about him, probably his teeth.

'I'm not very hungry tonight'. Ria said. 'I'll just have a plate of soup and a cold drink. I'm thirsty rather than hungry'.

We'd eaten fish, so I had the same and Fawkes gave our order with his. Here is a further detail of truth to which I was too blind to react at the time. Had Ria not been interested in creating a good impression on Fawkes, she would have instantly called me a pig for trying to eat twice that night. To have more food to overcome embarrassment would not have been a strong enough reason to prevent her from insulting me in front of a stranger. I don't think I've ever met a woman who could offend more ruthlessly than Ria. But because it pleased her that night she only smiled a little, telling me thereby that she approved and was in league with my game.

To eat with someone is to establish a kind of intimacy. That's why, no doubt quite subconsciously, Ria had even liked the idea of eating again, even if it meant a second meal that night. She was certainly the only one to enjoy it, for as soon as the food was served I could see that Fawkes was embarrassed to eat in front of us. There are people who avoid society because they possess certain unfortunate impediments. There are those who get violent hiccups, which make their eyes protrude and their nose look like an old potato. There are people who break wind at the sight of cheese. There is a lady I know who suffers from a strange depression. She has lived retired in her charming apartment for twenty years. She never goes out, and she avoids seeing her servant at meal times. She has read about the dining-room of the mad King Ludwig of Bavaria which had a table that was lowered into the kitchens and was pulled up laden with food, so that no servant needed to attend. To possess such a contraption has become the dream of her life.

I mention these asides if only to hint at some explana-

tion of Fawkes' method of eating. By the time Ria and I had finished our hot soup, Fawkes had eaten exactly one half of a medium-sized potato. The treatment he gave to that potato has to be described to be believed. He twisted it and turned it, first with his knife, then with his fork. Then he dug each of these culinary instruments into it. One assumed he wanted to prove two things: (a) that the potato was dead, and (b) that the potato was soft. Having no doubt a most suspicious mind, he seemed bent on proving these two facts several more times to himself. He then proceeded to cut up the potato into at least twenty very small pieces, whereafter he picked up each piece separately on his fork, once more examining it all over, sometimes manipulating it round with his fork, sometimes holding his fork still and moving his head, before actually putting it into his mouth. Then he chewed each of the pieces with as many mastications as I would need to devour a whole steak. By and large I don't care how a man eats, as long as he does not rob the act of eating of the dignity of the earth. All food has to grow and as long as one eats with some kind of dignity, one's gratitude for the miracle does not have to be discussed. In the same way one feels outraged at the sight of blatant ingratitude.

What made this operation of eating last even longer was his talk. This incredible picker of food, as soon as food appeared on the table, lost all his shyness of manner and talk.

'You know where I live, don't you?' he asked me.

Klein hadn't told me. He must have assumed I knew.

'No, I don't', I said.

'Why, right opposite you. Of course you know, don't you? Haven't you ever seen me come out of my house?'

'Have you?' I asked Ria.

'I've seen him in our road several times, but I didn't know he lived there'.

'Funny', he said, half closing his eyes, and questioning

his train of thought. (At this point he started to attack the potato). 'Sure you've seen me', he went on, in a tone of charming flattery. 'Why, I've seen you come out of your place a dozen times. So you must have seen me'.

He was half smiling whilst he thus rationalised, like a child which plays hide and seek, and thinks if it can see you, you can see it too.

'Well I'm very sorry, but until you told me just now I simply didn't know where you lived. Now you've told me, mind you, it's somehow quite obvious to me that you live opposite us. You never know when you are getting ill, but once you are stricken with fever you often remember when it started'. I said.

'Yeah, quite. I'm sure, though, you've seen me'.

Ria and I laughed at his stubborn insistence.

'O.K. We've seen you dozens of times, and of course we knew all the time where you lived. Does that make you feel any better?' Ria said.

'Yeah, of course you did'.

I wanted to ask him whether there was anything the matter with his potato, but thinking he was old enough to find out for himself, refrained from doing so.

'Now what else do we know about him that we won't tell?' Ria asked me, beginning to make fun of him.

'Where did you learn German?' I asked. 'You seem to speak it very well. I've noticed you always speak German to Klein'.

*'Aber sicher. Ich hab ja in Oestreich gelebt'.*

'Did you live there during the war?' I wanted to know. I was curious about his Bavarian jacket. In England only an arrogant, insensitive German would wear such a jacket.

'And where the hell did you get this ugly jacket?' I asked.

'What's the matter with it? Don't you like it? It's *wunderbar, meinst du nicht?*'

He broke every now and then into German, which was

really quite unnecessary. I think he thought it would impress Ria, but I don't think it did. I never discussed language with her, but I am sure she liked only good strong speech. To break into foreign language is always an affectation.

'I think it's a horrible jacket. The Nazis revived all mediaeval costumes, and before the war half of Germany was walking around in them on their off uniform days'.  
'Aber was!'

'Did you live over there during the war?' I asked once more.

'Yeah, part of the war. And after the war'.

'How?'

'I was over there with the U.S. army. You don't think I was fighting for the bloody Germans, do you?'

'Why not? It's possible'.

He was a little offended, and it served him right for giving all these cryptic twists to his answers to my questions. But I hadn't really meant to hurt him by this remark.

'Do you like Don Giovanni?' he suddenly asked.

I had never seen the opera, neither had Ria.

'I've just made a recording of it over in Vienna. It's the greatest opera that's ever been written. What do you think of it?'

'I've never seen it. But what I've heard of it I like very much'.

'Of course you've seen it', he said 'you're kidding'.

He put down his fork so that he could use his left hand to support his chest whilst he laughed. It was a flattering laughter rather than a mocking one. Once more he played that game of disbelieving one.

'Why you've probably heard it so many times you don't want to talk about it'.

I noticed he was wearing a rubber band round his wrist, just an ordinary rubber band. On the fourth finger of his left hand he wore a wedding ring.

'Are you married?' Ria asked him.

'Yeah'.

'Where's your wife?'

'She's dead'.

Ria's mastery of 'putting her foot in' was unfailing. It was a joke between us, and whenever she did this she drooped her lower lip in a stance of naughtiness which was quite charming. This time, however, I did not dare look at her. I was afraid I would start giggling, and I could not think of a funny remark to make which would have given us the excuse to laugh. Fortunately Fawkes did not notice our momentary embarrassment.

'What sort of room have you got?' I asked him.

'Oh, it's marvellous. Central heating, it's always warm. Boiling water any time of the day, thick carpets, and the landlord comes in at night to tuck me in. Just lovely'. In between the funny stretches of speech he gave off yelps of endearing laughter.

'The trouble is, though, he comes back in when I'm asleep to read my mail and look through my papers. What do you think, eh?'

'What should I think? I think you're a lucky fellow', I said

'Sure I've got a lousy room. It's a room where you can freeze to death even in summer, it smells, it's dirty as hell, and the bloody landlord, a great big fat slob, actually goes into my room when I'm not there to read my mail. I'm moving. Know anything?'

'No, I don't'. I said.

In London people at one time were always asking you for rooms, even when they didn't want to move. I'm talking of the time when there was an acute housing shortage, when you couldn't get a room for money, and everybody asked everybody else whether they knew of anything. People like to change their clothes, their flats, their rooms, in fact anything you can think of, and if things are difficult and they can't change these things, they like the



idea of changing better even than change itself. That's why he asked, too. He was obviously quick to sense the national mood.

'You'll be able to find something alright', Ria said. 'I'll ask some of our friends.'

'I thanks', he said. He half closed his eyes as he said this and he spoke to her with a soft, intimate voice, as he had done when he had said an extra 'how d'you do' to her. He obviously had different voices for different people.

By now he had eaten about ten picks of his potato, and one could see that he was never going to finish his meal. In fact, for all the time I knew Lawkes, he never finished a meal. Even when you gave him a fruit drop, he'd only take a few licks at it and then dispose of it somewhere. And yet the strange fact is that you wouldn't have called him a small eater. He always ordered a big meal, but by the time he had devoured a couple of beans, the rest of his food was cold. It was a meanness in him which made him eat like that. And it was that same sterling quality in him which made conversation with him unsatisfactory. He would give only bits and pieces of himself and dug you in the ribs when he asked you questions about yourself.

His staccato questions and the way he came back several times to certain points in the conversation, certainly created the impression that he was a profound and interesting person. This impression was further borne out by the very questions he asked which at first seemed quite unrelated to one another but which to him were entirely connected by a system of most acute and profound intelligence. He had a further quality of the truly intelligent man. In order not to intimidate you with his superior knowledge, he would always insist on giving you at least the benefit of the doubt, or he would even credit you with knowledge you did not possess. Nasty people can do this too. You can plant knowledge into the brain of a vain person, then construct an argument, make them take one false step, and decimate these very new plants.

with a viciousness that leaves this plot of brain barren for the rest of its life. Unimaginative people, too, can imply greater knowledge in others than they possess. They imagine this process will be equally used for their benefit, so that there arises an agreeable concord of knowledge which does not exist at all. But Aaron Fawkes was not at all reflexive in that sense. Here was a man, overburdened with real knowledge, in a tragic frame of mind, since he was young and already a widower, clamouring for friendship. That last fact was immediately apparent to us both by the warm manner in which he had greeted us, in the charming playfulness of his conversation, and in his insistence on paying for our soup. On our way home Ria and I remarked to each other that we had not noticed what exactly was wrong with his mouth. I suppose if a wolf does not attack you, you are not aware of its sharp teeth. At a certain point of social intimacy, everybody forgets everybody's faults. We were very pleased to have met him.

The earth is divided by water, and man uses ships and bridges and aqueducts to link up the land. Other than in first love, when man and woman join to form an island, men and women make links with one another, and use each other as bridges to reach new vistas of the world. The bridge of the great thinker and the great artist, everybody traverses sooner or later. Some construct smaller bridges, for fewer people, others build tiny wooden bridges across a brook, to be used by themselves only. I mention this simply to serve honesty in writing down my first impressions of Aaron Fawkes. I wanted to be Klein's friend. That is the only bridge I was constructing that night. But one always forgets when constructing these bridges that other people can use them too.

## VI

Nothing except brutality can be achieved in cold blood, and I think the schemer is a brutal person. There are degrees of brutality as there are many ways of killing flies, but fundamentally the schemer is brutal as the fly is dead after it has been killed. You can hit at a fly which irritates you, and you will probably miss. You can hit it in flight and already you are scheming a little because you instinctively anticipate its course which you try to intercept. You can wait until the fly has settled on some moist speck within your reach, and you wait until it has sucked up the speck. It lifts its front legs to clean its tiny trunk. Then, thinking the fly is off guard, you swipe at it. But the real schemer will wait until he has studied the movements of a fly for some time. He will let it fly off, knowing it will most probably return. This element of the gamble fascinates the schemer and sharpens his wits. He will wait in the same position for any length of time, his hand poised for attack, but keeping this hand poised long enough for the fly to think it is part of its surroundings. One false move and the fly wins its life. The hunt must not excite him. He must concentrate only on killing the fly. He kills at the exact moment when the fly finally trusts him, taking his hand for an area to explore. If it were easy to be brutal, every man could be a schemer.

When I came back from Scotland in June four years ago, Aaron Lawles was staying in our house. He had had further difficulties with his wretched landlord, and we had plenty of room to put him up. As I've said, it wasn't easy in those days to find a room in London.

Our house is large and uncomfortable. It gets very cold in the winter, when the discomfort gets worse, but in summer the large rooms with their ever open doors allow

a kind of public freedom for everyone who enters. There is nothing private about the place, there is nowhere for you to be alone. The furniture, for the most part, is shoddy, and this allows the visitor either to be careless or awkward. No elegance has been achieved in a single corner of the house. It was alright for Ria, but only time has given me some kind of affection for the place. It didn't disturb Ria. She was completely uncreative about the house. Not that she had bad taste. It was simply that that element to which one applies taste in living was completely lacking in her.

Aaron was sleeping in the large spare bedroom. He had moved his stuff in, but his cases weren't unpacked. They remained like that for some time, although the cases were open, and all his belongings were scattered in an 'unholy mess' about the room. I mean this expression quite literally. Shoes were standing on his linen shirts either dirty or unfolded, were hanging over the side of one suitcase, looking like the dead in a drifting lifeboat. His books were in untidy heaps on the floor, some lying face downwards, then pages spradeagled. There was no clean or tidy corner anywhere. Whenever I see real untidiness, I admire it. I have an old-fashioned respect for the Bohemian, a kind of romantic respect. I once read somewhere that Bohemians are bad revolutionaries because they feel neither enmity towards society nor may they claim any allegiance to it. This phrase has a very special appeal to me, why I don't quite know. It must have something to do with my own private sense of exile. I, too, detest the idea of belonging.

I thought at first that Aaron's untidiness was a bohemian quality in him and a generous gesture. There were good things lying on the floor. Americans very often have a strange sense of waste about them, which one can easily mistake for generosity. Quite frankly I was a bit confused about his untidiness. If it was bohemian then it was no good without a Bohemian. Because Lawkes didn't look

bohemian. His hands were clean, his trousers were pressed, he always wore a tie. I once knew a man who possessed only one suit and one shirt. He washed his shirt every night, and he pressed his suit every morning. He always looked smart, and I am sure that no-one ever detected the reason for his intense nervousness. Clothes protect one, and the more clothes one possesses the more protected one feels. Fawkes was obviously a one-suit man. He possessed more clothes, but he only kept one set clean. Perhaps that is why he had his Bavarian outfit. You don't have to clean or iron leather jerkins or those fancy coats.

There was something quite incongruous about Fawkes and his untidiness, and I discovered the clue to it all when a few days later, after I had returned, I was talking to him in his room, and picking up odd bits and pieces of his possessions to look at. I found a photograph at the bottom of one of his boxes. It was badly bent across one of the corners, and the folding mark struck right across the picture. It was a picture of E. She looked as if she had been struck out.

'What d'you got there?' he asked. 'Lemme sec'.

I gave him the photograph. I noticed he didn't try to bend it back.

'Don't bend it back, or the f . . . . thing will break. Wouldn't matter much 'cause it's a lousy photograph anyway, but's the only one I got of her'.

It was half past eleven in the morning, and he was still in bed. He had a pullover on. He looked terrible in the morning. His dark stubble didn't grow long enough to make his face dark. It made it grey. He gave the photograph back to me. I didn't know what to do with it, so I dropped it back into the box. He saw me drop it back into the box, and didn't wince.

The fact that he didn't even wince when he saw me drop the picture of his dead wife made me very sad. He was holding himself back, in a manly way, I thought, and

thereby made me look small and feel awkward. I didn't know what to do with myself after that, and I left the room. Just as I went out he smiled at me. I smiled back to show him I had understood that he had forgiven me. It must have been my thinking about this little incident that soon after explained to me his strange untidiness and his lazy way of living.

He was still living with his dead wife. It is quite absurd to imagine that we stop living with people once they have died. My father still has not visited the grave of one of his brothers whom he hated. This is quite consistent with our instinct to survive. We will not accept death. So why shouldn't Aaron have gone on living with E.? That's why he had said 'yeah' when Ria had asked him in the Café whether he was married.

What people say is the love they feel for someone who has just died is invariably admiration, which they mistake for love. One admires a dead person. One admires them for having reached death, for having withstood the whole onslaught of living, the onslaught on their soft bodies, and for now having concluded their life. Their life, however disgusting their conduct may have been, suddenly assumes shape. The form of their life becomes beautiful. It is only when a man fights desperately for his own survival that he hates the dead. But this, when his turn comes, makes him even more beautiful. No. The dead are always beautiful, and it is not surprising therefore that F. went on being Aaron's bride.

So he lived with her whilst she was disintegrating in the earth. There was decay about the room. That was it. I'd mistaken it for untidiness. Everything was left to rot, everything looked dead, uninhabited, even the bed. When you went into his room in the morning before he had woken up you saw his head covered by the sheet, and his body was covered with dishevelled blankets and dirty laundry. He slept with the sheet right over his head, so that no part of him was uncovered. Was he not using the

sheet as a shroud? I think a shroud is a holy garment. It is the skin men give you for your last protection. Aaron was using the sheet as a shroud to share the sensation of death with his dead bride.

## VII

I must say Aaron Fawkes was a most pleasant fellow about the house. He was a charming guest. He had a nice, imperceptible quality about his behaviour. He wasn't there unless he was asked. Every time we had a meal, we had especially to invite him to have it with us, which showed that he had a constant appreciation of us, and a feeling of gratitude. I like appreciation and gratitude, and I often regret terribly my lack of them. He was still in bed when I left for the office in the morning, and unless I saw him at dinner in the evening I used not to see him until later on in the Café where we still went every night to seal off the day. He was often with Klem, and we saw more of Klein and got to know him well. He often came to our house after the Café closed at midnight. Our kitchen became a warm, wonderful, alive place. Both Aaron and Klein loved our kitchen. I remember redecorating it, painting the walls dark blue and the woodwork cream. When it was all finished Ria got very depressed and asked me whether I thought the place might still be the same as before. We were both really frightened the first time Klem came in after that. He walked round the room once or twice, as if to mark time before giving his opinion. Then he said:

'Hm. Charming'.

Which of course was the last thing the place was.

'*Is doch schon, was?*' Aaron asked him in a persuasive tone of voice. 'It's painted dark because of the kids. You can't see their dirty hands on the wall'.

'Now that is nice' Klein said to Aaron, 'Now I like it. Mind you, I'd far rather see their hands on the wall. I love children's dirt marks. But now you've said that I'll always imagine their hands behind the paint'.



He took off his coat and hung it over the back of the chair. The way he did this, not taking any more notice of the room, reassured us that nothing had been spoilt.

The conversations during these late night sessions were a great delight. Klein told marvellous stories in which he described things with great precision and wit. Whenever there was a slight pause Aaron prompted him to tell this or that story, to relate this or that incident. With these promptings Aaron always of course put himself into the picture. It's a funny thing that to this day I hate people who prompt others to tell stories and who go on prompting them during the telling. At the time it was jealousy in my part. I was jealous of Aaron for having had a past with Klein, a rich past as he was giving us to understand. They had travelled to various countries together, they had seen each other for long periods every day for a long time. And I thought a multitude of friends in common. Klein gave Lawkes great stature in those early days. And every time Lawkes prompted Klein to tell a story using him as his storyteller. I felt more jealous whilst more of their great world was being revealed. Later on I noticed that this prompting was a habit of Lawkes. He was always doing it in order to give one the feeling of exuberance which made one talk more, more freely, too freely at times. He was the prompter and the audience at the same time. Aaron really had a wonderful technique for telling stories. All he needed was someone to tell them. I say technique not because I want to be sarcastic in any way. He really did something whilst he was sitting there and prompting which made one forget that he hardly spoke at all and yet one felt that he was so very much connected with the stories one heard that he too could have told them.

There is no doubt that it was because of Klein that Aaron quickly strode into the centre of our life. I can speak best for myself here though now Ria has gone I must speak for her too. One really relies more often than

one admits on one's judgment of other people's judgments. As far as Fawkes' integrity was concerned, we relied on Klein. As far as his honesty was concerned, we relied on Klein. As far, even, as his sanity was concerned, we relied on Klein. Klein gave him all the unwritten and unasked-for references. What I liked best about Fawkes though was that he gave us Klein. I remember the innumerable conversations I had with Ria at the time about Klein. Klein was an enormous mosaic we were constructing, for which Aaron brought us a hundred new pieces every day.

We learnt from Klein that for the past year Aaron had been in a distressed state of mind, presumably as a result of E's death. Two or three years ago his favourite brother had committed suicide and Klein was terrified that Aaron was following a subconscious pattern which might lead him to a similar end. As soon as he started living in our house this depression appeared to subside and we felt immensely gratified at this transformation. Klein, of course had a lot to do with this. He had no children of his own and he was apt to look upon Aaron as a son. Aaron's father lived in America, removed from him by three thousand miles and old age. He was a man of over eighty, a banker, a man as Aaron described him, concerned only with the tradition of his famous forbears, the Fawkes, which he spent all his life to uphold. As I think of it now there was almost a touch of Kuamazov in Aaron's relationship with Klein. Had they not both been after F? The story ends at her death but more likely than not their bond of friendship was afterwards strengthened by the love they had had in common for the same woman.

It was quite natural for Aaron to look to me somehow to replace his dead brother. Since I have no brother it was a new experience for me to be taken for one. Apparently I even looked like his brother, and this, as well as the fact that Aaron liked me soon made my resemblance to his brother greater than it possibly could have been. The

dead don't stand a chance against the living. Without the image of the resurrection Christ would have been forgotten long ago.

If I became Aaron's brother, what about Ria? You can not take your brother's wife. I had no right even to suspect Aaron. Was he not still in the throes of grief for I's death? Was he likely to heal his wound by seeking new love? I did not suspect him at the time of attempting to make new conquests. On the contrary, I distinctly remember my desire to tell him to try and find a woman to love, but I never mentioned this to him because I thought to do so was indelicate in view of I's recent death. There is a ridiculous note in my diary, inspired by Aaron at the time.

The essential difference between animals and human beings is that when the former get wounded they become ferocious and they attack. Human beings become all soft and gentle. I prefer the reaction of the animal.

I indulged at the time in helping Aaron overcome his depression. The slightest sign of aggression from him was an indication of our success.

I like clean cut things from crystal to decisions. I also have a weakness for obsessions. When I drink water I always imagine I am in the desert. To stop myself from drinking fast and to excess I think of a corpse in the well and that the water is polluted. I still drink more than my thirst requires to be quenched because in the moment of any obsession one imagines one is filled with so much power that one is immune to anything. Not to keep an eye on one's health is to be blind. Quite so. I am always too busy with my stupid mind doing one thing, and one thing only to think of anything else. I could give dozens of examples of my mode of behaviour and they would all point to this failing in me which makes me so blind.

Whilst I was trying to help Aaron, I had no idea that he at the same time was trying to help me. There, you

can see how blind I was. Do you know I did not discover until a year later that Aaron had come into our house in order to help us? Yes, Klein told me a year later.

Really sensitive people have got something which I should love to possess. They have the power to assess a situation at a glance, to surmise, simply to feel the whole situation between two or more people. Great conductors can close their eyes and hear the slightest discord of any instrument. Thus Aaron must have heard the discords of our marriage, and he resolved to come and live in our house to help us stay together. I cannot say what particular discords so frightened him to take this course. It is but another aspect of my blindness which prevents me from seeing myself as others see me.

## VIII

I've said earlier on that ours was a turbulent marriage. Ria and I came from different backgrounds and we never succeeded in overcoming this diversity. The details of our backgrounds are unimportant to our story. Suffice it for me to say that mine was strict and orderly and Ria's kind, good, endowed with greater love. A strict background makes one opposed to all others because of the very nature of its stupid selfishness. I know all about this now, but it is too late for me to swallow my pride. I should have spat it out long ago.

I remember Ria's father asking me before we were married whether I was aware of the great difference in our backgrounds. As far as I remember I didn't give a particular answer but simply brushed it aside with 'yes' or 'it doesn't seem to matter to me'. I mention this because it seems significant to me to remember the question now although my answer to it at the time was vague and unimportant. Sensuality is apt to make one blind to wisdom.

I know now that ours was a marriage of revolt. I have always been a rebel and from as far back as I can remember. I rebelled against the two usual things, authority and convention. I remember quite clearly the ridiculous annoyance of one of our maids when I refused to fetch a duster from the kitchen. I was perhaps four years old at the time and she simply asked me 'Would you like to go to the kitchen to fetch the duster?' I thought for a moment and I remember being quite aware at the time of the choice I had before me. I could say 'yes' or 'no'. After all I had not been commanded. I said 'no', and she got angry. She wouldn't let me into the kitchen, my favourite place for about a week. But no

one and nothing has ever obscured my freedom of choice, although I have been guilty thousands of times of following convention rather than taking an unpopular decision. But never, never without feeling guilty. I think everybody is alike in this, else we would all spend our time spitting into each other's faces.

I can substantiate how true my feeling of revolt was in marrying Ria. The first time I met her, I thought she was very ugly. She was untidy, dirty, slovenly dressed. At the same time, there were things about her which fascinated me, the eyes, above all the energy she possessed, the way she walked and held her head very high, and her complete lack of any kind of pretence whatever. But I found her undesirable when I first met her, and the fact that this aspect changed later on, was due, I am sure, to the rebellion, succeeding with my body as well as with my head.

When I first went to the house in which Ria shared a room with her sister, I felt I was being sucked into an atmosphere which was unlike anything I'd ever known and which I found stimulating and attractive. They lived in a basement, and there was a party going on. Both Bella and Ria wore black dresses, and cheap oriental jewellery which Bella had brought back from India. They were burning incense sticks, and the air was heavy with the sweet stench. We were very young in those days and there was nothing conscious in our coming together. We drifted into intimacy and marriage. As one grows older, one senses the shortness of life, one craves for the freedom of youth, and one rebels against one's wife because one must always really be alone. For a time, love hides this truth. It acts like a drug on pain, but it does not cure the disease.

How calculating Ria was in marrying me, I cannot say. She was a very cunning woman later on, and I cannot now rule out that she calculated and designed to marry me. How much, though, was she conscious of the

future, how much of the true future did she envisage at the time? None of it. The hell we already went through in our early days was terrible. She could not have envisaged that, and we could not have prevented it. That is why, probably, she was as innocent as I was. I will tell you another reason why I don't think she was consciously inveigling me into marriage.

She had been engaged to Avram. Avram had been a young architectural student, who was completing his studies in England before settling in Canada. Ria was engaged to him, and the marriage was to take place after he had qualified. One morning, on his way to a lecture, he was killed in a road accident.

A person like Ria could not accept tragedy in silence. That was her energy. She fought against it, she was outraged by it, and she rebelled against it. I remember quite early on writing a poem for Avram, in which I asked him to forgive me for being alive and telling him I would not take Ria away from him. It is easy to be generous to the dead. But even if I did not wish what I had written, to be true, it was.

I tried in all kinds of ways to obliterate Avram from our lives. I treated him as a brother, as her lover, as an enemy. But it was all to no avail. This dead man, whom I had never known, became a source of incredible power to Ria, and she used it as anyone would use a given source of power. She had in him an unquestionable, untouchable defender, a scapegoat, an angel, a devil, a god-like being. It was a very hard struggle from the beginning. You may ask why, if the difficulties were so great between us right from the beginning, did we stay together at a time when we could have so easily withdrawn from one another? Because we thrived on the tension of a turbulent relationship. To a rebel, tension is a constant inspiration.

It was interesting to note that Fawkes' Christian name was similar to Avram's. This struck me at the time,

though I did not attach any significance to it. What did not strike me at the time was that Ria would search all her life for her dead lover. I too loved someone once with a most burning passion. I was very young at the time, and very afraid, and my fear drove a wall between us which we could not break down. Yet even now I would not replace her image by someone else's. I feel it fattens my life. Can one not say that Ria's sorrow about Avram was so great that this sorrow made her attempt to destroy him? One can. One can also say that all women are whores. That is also true.

There is a charming story which Fawkes once prompted Klein to tell me. When Klein first came to England from Vienna in the late 'thirties, he was staying with some friends of friends. They had a beautiful young daughter, 'a real English beauty, with skin smooth as powder' as he described her. He was very tempted to pay her court, but thought it would not be right as he was the guest of the house. From the way he described the whole episode, it was quite clear that he was in love with the girl. He noticed everything about her, the way she worked her toe inside her soft shoes when she was excited and laughing, and the way she bit into the long strands of hair with which she continually played when listening to him talk. After a time he suspected that she too was in the grip of the 'uneasiness of love' as he put it, when in his presence. But he was not sure of this until he noticed a most touching manoeuvre in the bathroom. Each day her toothbrush was nearer his, and after a week or so, they were so close that they almost touched one another. 'Of course nothing ever happened between us' Klein had said, implying that if it had the whole charm of the episode would have been spoilt.

I connect this story with a similar manoeuvre which went on in our house soon after Aaron moved in. I frequently have to be away from home in pursuit of my business. I now remember that often when I returned



home after a few days, Aaron's room had been shifted. Was this done to make him more comfortable, was it done for some convenience or other, was it done to make the noise of nocturnal movements unfamiliar to other members of the household, or was it done simply to repeat, in some megalomaniacal way, the movements of the toothbrushes? I would now say it was the last which was the chief cause of these moves. I would even say that it was not entirely subconscious stupidity. There are people who get senile at a very early age. Senility is falsely associated with old age and loss of energy. I think this loss of energy need have nothing to do with old age. That which takes all energy in the end is death. That which taps energy most ruthlessly is the realisation of death, dying. I can imagine that if one has a disease from which one will die, one notices one is dying even before one knows one is ill. One might wish to pick up one's knife and fork to eat with, and one suddenly imagines that the fork isn't there at all. If, after all it is, one thinks one has overcome a major crisis, mind and body work once more, like a watch which has stopped for a moment, and which one has shaken back to work. In his despair, man copies man. Aaron's bride had only died recently, so how could he not have been continually aware of his own death? He was on intimate terms of friendship with Klein, and therefore knew of Klein's episode with the toothbrushes. He was desperate to break his mood of depression, and unable to create anew, he was willing to copy anything which could help him.

A man cannot help himself when he is really desperate. He reveals himself in desperation. He reaches the point, as I've said right at the beginning, where he can transform no more. That is the point where one can judge a man.

I once lived in the country for a whole year. In the late Spring you hear the cuckoo quite clearly, quite nearby. You stop and listen, take no further step in case you

frighten the bird away. But when you have heard it's coo a few times more you suddenly realise that this is not the first time you have heard it. You have, in fact, heard it several times before that year, but only now realise this.

## IX

I cannot now remember the time I took no notice of A. There was such a time, but I cannot now remember it. I saw her every day from the moment she came to our office as a girl of sixteen in answer to an advertisement for a short-hand typist. And just as I could not, at the beginning, more than six years ago now, have described all aspects of her, the colour of her eyes, for example, because I had taken no particular notice of her, neither could I have done so later on because I was no longer at a sufficient distance from her for my eyes to take proper aim at her reality.

I know now that with all women who have aroused my interest I have passed through a period of blindness. It is because some part of me is essentially a patient who craves continually for the attention of the nurses. O these wretched nurses, with their insatiable desire to do you harm, to hurt you. Yes, one lives under an illusion if one thinks they are there simply to do the chores for the sick and to assist the surgeons in their gruelling tasks. No. To me they only exist to prepare you for all the cruelties you can think of. As a boy, because of the lack of skill of the surgeons who performed the operation on my ears when I was nine months old, I spent many months in hospitals. I crave for these nurses. I crave for some sort of sickness, and, I suppose, for my childhood. That is why I go through these periods of blindness.

I associate nurses with the same qualities that A. possessed. She was neat, clean, tidy and cruel. She gave me all kinds of injections to prepare me for the operating table. But I noticed none of these tricks. One day I was simply ready, ready to be wheeled to the surgeons, to be strapped down on the operating table. Behind my back

they discussed the size of chisel they would use for my operation. To my face, one of the nurses told me to keep quite still, to inhale the gas properly, not to worry.

We used to leave the office at about the same time, though I usually went a little earlier. One day we left the office together. I don't know even now why we did so that day, but it was quite inevitable. I remember A. coming into my room at about half-past four, after my father had already left, and saying quite simply: 'Shall we go now?' It was a command, and my face must have looked pale on hearing it, as it must have done when they wheeled me into the operating theatre. For months I had been prepared for this event, and now the time had come for the surgeons or the oven. Yes. I have a parallel in the story which most haunted me when I was a child. When Hänsel is caught by the witch he is locked into the cage and inspected every day to find out whether he has fattened sufficiently to make a fine repast for her. The story tells of the witch being tricked into a ghastly death, but in my nightmares it was always I who was being pushed into the flames. Fear is a drug of which the haunted become addicts.

That afternoon we walked through the park and strange thoughts went through my head. I remember one or two of them. I sometimes go to see a friend who has a factory. Once, I waited for him in the corridor outside his office. A woman dressed in a white overall came out of a door, carrying a hat. She looked like a prison wardress, and she held the hat away from her as if it were infested with some dreadful disease, or if there were blood on the hat which horrified her. Perhaps they had executed a man, and perhaps other women in white overalls would come out of the door in a minute, carrying his dismembered limbs. I know that my heart stopped beating for a second when my friend finally opened the door, and at first I refused to go into the room, saying I was in a hurry and could he come now.

I also remember that I looked for birds in the park. A few days before I had seen a dead bird at the foot of one of the statues near the lake. It must have crashed against the stone in the night. I hate to look at birds close by, because for close inspection they must be either caged or dead. To me, they only become birds when they fly. Birds are always far away.

It was therefore with a thought of horror and a shrinking from reality that I entered the park with A., and both these thoughts were part of my fear. I was afraid, instinctively afraid of A., but I found this fear full of pleasure.

There are certain aspects of one's life which one leaves unresolved for as long as one lives. When I think of my sexual imagination, and the very small part of it I dare put into practice, I realise how very little I allow myself to experience of what is a wide and wonderful field to explore. But I am ashamed and afraid. To be afraid in that sense is bound up with one's vanity, but even if one analyses one's fear away one is still left with one's shame. Is it that one's imaginative life in these matters is far stronger and more harmonious than reality? Or is this negation of one's imagined desires merely a warding off of death, in the way that one leaves certain things unresolved, untouched, for use at a later date, even though one knows that the time will never come to fulfil these desires?

I think that A. to me was such a desire. As we walked through the park the noise of the world was subdued. People only whispered to one another as they passed us. It was a warm late summer afternoon and A. wore a light dress, and she looked cool and clean. She had beautiful hands. The bones of her fingers were sparsely covered so that their shape was not distorted. Her eyes were bereft of shyness which made me feel I could stare at her without embarrassment. There was something regal about her posture. We talked very little. Language is a precision which love does not recognise.

I left A. that evening when she boarded a bus to take her home. I was both confused and glad at our parting; confused because I suddenly wanted to do many things at the same time, in some ridiculous form of order which absconded reality the moment I thought of them. For example I wanted to see the face of the bus-driver, to scrutinise his face carefully to see whether he was quite fit to conduct his cumbersome vehicle through the maze of London. I wanted to ask him when his engine had last been checked, so that no unforeseen accident could happen on technical grounds. I wanted to tell the conductor A's destination, to pay her fare, to ask him to help her off the bus. I wanted to wave to her until the bus disappeared at the corner of the street. But I did none of these things. When the bus left, I walked home, without a thought in my head.

It is marvellous how quickly one becomes considerate, a great lover, a great hero, the moment one foresees that one can act these roles for a few moments without any fear of being called upon to persist in one's performance. Heroism plays a large part in any man's dreams, and the fact that this sexual heroism comes to my mind the moment I leave someone I am supposed to love, has often struck me for its abject cowardice. It's a kind of cat-and-mouse game, only the cat never catches the mouse, the reason being that the hero one envisages someone else to be, is never the hero one can possibly be oneself. I think that to dream of heroism is an escape from reality, and the relation of such dreams with women is the most wonderful stimulant to love.

## X

Our affair crashed to the ground three years ago when D., my late wife's brother, came on a visit to England from America. D. is an actor who lives in California. To this day I have not forgiven him for his part in this break-up, and I don't think I ever will.

He came to London to appear in a play, and after the first night there was a party at our house to which A. also was invited. Some of the guests stayed very late, and as A. wanted to get home by about midnight I asked D. to drive her back in my car. Two days later Ria said to me:

'A.'s the family whore! D. has been seeing her every night since the party'.

I remember when Ria told me this she was in one of her unbearably boisterous moods, during which her haughtiness knew no bounds. There was always an aspect of triumph in her personality, and when she was triumphant about anything she felt at her freest. I like the idea of a triumphant woman, but I cannot bear her in the flesh.

D. was sharing a room with Aaron whilst on his visit to London, and apparently my brother-in-law had been describing to him in great detail his pursuit of A. Ria had got to know all about it from Aaron. That is what I discovered later. A cruder man than Aaron would have found a way of warning me directly to protect myself against A.'s deception. But Aaron, with his sensitive nature, couldn't. He was himself trapped. Had he come to me to warn me I would have had to admit my affair with A. to him. Had I done so, I might have begun to suspect him and Ria. What could he do in this grotesque situation where my wife was using her brother to get rid of her husband's lover? Aaron was easy meat in this situation.

He was like a steak which you beat with a mallet five times its size to break all the sinews which might make it tough. What I did not know at the time was that Aaron was fond of malignant intrigue.

Intrigue is a very interesting pastime which everybody enjoys to a point. I am sure that with Aaron it was somehow linked with his father being a banker. A banker, after all, must share his clients' strictest confidence. Once he has won this he has them in his power, he can make or mar their deals, whilst he himself is always protected many times over by securities, guarantees and the like. A good banker never abuses his power.

I believe that the instincts which drive our fathers drive us too. We try to change to become different, and invariably we succeed. But their instincts are our starting points. Is it not possible that if old Fawkes was a good banker, Aaron used the same instinct of power for abuse? Since he was not a man of position in the world of money, which must have set his early standards of society, is it not possible that at one point of his life he thought to himself: well, since I shan't have anything to do with people in a way which will allow me to make or mar their lives, I might as well have some fun! Is not destruction the natural sequel to failure? A painter who botches up his canvas tears it up. I once burnt a pound note because I didn't have any money. I once knew a farmer who became a circus director. He had been unsuccessful as a farmer, and had lost a great herd of cows because, he maintained, 'the wrong food had been fed to the beasts'. He told me that he had never been attracted to the circus until he lost his farm, and that the maltreatment of animals to make them perform was his revenge against his loss. He told me he had the best dog-team in the country, and he proudly showed me the marks on their hindlegs and bellies where they had been branded during their training. 'That one makes them jump' he used to say, pointing to one mark, and pointing to another



he said: 'and that one makes them remember to jump'. In Aaron, though, the sense was lacking to make use even of failure. I don't quite know how to put it. He bore me no grudge. I had done nothing to him for which he could seek revenge. He simply watched my relationship with A. being destroyed, and even aided its destruction.

A day or two after the party I confronted A. with my suspicion and she did not deny what had happened between her and D. She said it was due to my lack of attention to her during the past few months, and I had to look upon it either as a revenge or a starting point to renewed love. There is a ridiculous note in my diary on the day I talked to A., in which I describe 'the lion of my flesh going wild within me'. I don't remember whether this refers to my love of A., (for I forgave her at once), or to my hatred of D. I went back that night and told D. to leave my house.

My affair with A. broke up from then on. Love cannot be forced or transplanted. It is akin to music, because of the distances, the silences between notes. After an unpassioned evanescence of love, during which my passion was kindled by my lust to destroy D., everything which had been a tie between us became separated. There was nothing we could do about it. It was like going to sleep with the fear that one will wake up as a different person. I once wrote a letter to someone when in the middle of the letter the idea came to me that suddenly my handwriting was changing, my whole body was changing, my ideas, everything, so that the second part of the letter would be written by a different person, and then even that changed and I was no longer writing a letter at all. That is how it became between A. and me.

A friend who was dying of cancer described his disease to me. At the beginning of his illness, when he was still up and about, he used to make fun of the lumps that were growing in the region of his kidneys. He tried all sorts of cures, knowing all the time that there was really

nothing one could do. 'These wretched lumps at my side!' he told me one day, 'I noticed them first when they were about the size of cuckoos' eggs. There is something of the cuckoo about this disease. You hatch it, thinking nothing of it, and suddenly you have cancer. All one's life one has aches and pains one takes no notice of. The doctors tell me that had I gone to them about nine months ago they might have been able to cure me. One of the treacheries of the cuckoo is that it lays its eggs in foreign nests. It's an intrigue they have with nature, and it has always seemed incredible to me that they have survived as a species. But then the birds who unsuspectingly hatch their eggs are fools like me. It's a malignant intrigue the cuckoo plays at. The bird is a parasite. Do you know' he suddenly asked me, 'that the question of the parasite has always fascinated me?' I said I hadn't known, and he told me: 'I used to respect everybody. I respected every scoundrel and every saint. But now I think that to look upon saints and scoundrels as equals is nonsense. Survival is everything, but there must be a code of honour attached to it. The tiger pursues the Zebra and kills it for prey. But whoever has felt any disgust with a tiger? And yet a cuckoo I find absolutely disgusting.' I failed to see what all these interesting observations had to do with his disease. I told him so, and after ridiculing my stupidity he said: 'You see, if what survives is good, everything is permissible. The Tiger eviscerates the Zebra and devours its entrails to preserve itself and all Tigers. But this cancer, what is being preserved by its growth? Nothing. It is changing the form that I am. It is killing me and it's heading for destruction. I had always a terror of being burnt after my death. I still have. But I have laid it down that I be cremated when I die, because I want to destroy that which is destroying me'.

I never saw him again after that evening. I had a postcard from him a few months later asking me why the hell I didn't come over to see him, with a chicken and some

oranges. I didn't go over to see him because I was a virgin as far as the sight of the dead was concerned. I was frightened to go to him, and to find him dead by the time I got there.

## XI

It is quite true that a man very often manoeuvres his own unhappiness, because he cannot live without its tension. I did not manoeuvre the affair between Ria and Aaron, but when Klein told me about it a year after it had been going on, I did nothing about it.

Klein didn't tell me, nor did anyone else, what had been going on, until one day in the middle of my sister-in-law's visit to England. Bella, Ria's sister, and her whole family, consisting of one tired husband and three beautiful children, descended on us from New York in the summer three years ago. Descend is not quite the right word. They invaded us. They literally invaded our house, and then, even those odd corners and the odd hours which I had reserved for some kind of privacy, were flooded with noise and family squalor. To start with, the children never adjusted themselves to the difference in time which exists between America and Europe. They howled for food at four in the morning and were tired when they were meant to play in the park. Neither could the parents adjust themselves because of the children.

I was still trying to write the book I told you about earlier on, and I remember many times going to all the rooms in our house to find one empty, and finding some human being or other in each one. I thought at the time of a charming punishment. Imagine two offenders being condemned to greet one another for a whole month. They have to shake hands, embrace one another or even kiss. It is not so much the physical strain that will soon break them, but the standstill of their lives. One says 'bless you' to someone who sneezes, because at that moment his or her nerves are dead and one wishes to call them back to life. Greetings to me have always meant the same. I have tested

this. I have often wished to be most affectionate to Klein and I have thought out all kinds of warm-hearted ways of greeting him. I see him very often, sometimes three times a week, but never have I greeted him like this. It is only an idea, from which I physically shrink because it is dead. My sister-in-law's visit was such a greeting. Life stopped. The kettle was left on the stove, the water steamed off, and ultimately the kettle burst. During this time I was often so full of rage that my temper destroyed my self-control. Klein thought it had partly to do with Aaron, and to calm me he told me what he knew.

'Look here' he said to me one night, 'I feel it is only right that I should tell you . . . '.

'Tell me what?' I asked.

'But surely you know, surely you haven't been blind all this time?'

'Blind to what?' I asked.

'Well, you must swear to me that you will tell me the truth, I feel very much responsible. After all, it was through me that you met Aaron'.

I still did not know what he was getting at, and then he told me. I remember I was most incredulous at the time, and laughed at first because he had put down my rage to suspicion

'Of course I only tell you now because it's all over. This happened many months ago, and it's finished with. Ria swore to me two days ago that it was finished, and I must say she looked quite honest when she told me. Of course . . . '.

I was amused and rather angry about it all.

'Now you must tell me one thing, and you must tell me the truth', Klein repeated, 'do you want me to tell Aaron to go away? I can quite easily tell him to go, but I think that it is something you should decide'.

'Why should he go away?' I asked. 'Ria has to make up her mind between us, and her choice will be my test of her. If she chooses him, then to hell with her, and if

she chooses me it will only strengthen our love. I don't think one should destroy something which can test a relationship'.

Dostoevsky has a great number of these triangular situations. He always hastens to form friendships between the insulted and the villain, and leaves the woman quite free to reign like a goddess. He was the author whom I had read more than anyone else at that time, and to find myself in this situation was strange, exciting and absolutely without pain. Klein said he could have predicted my reaction.

I did not let on to anyone what I had learned from Klein. I don't even know how much of it I believed. It puzzled me more than it explained to me. Although I am so blind I can usually piece things together retrospectively and accurately. But how did it explain the enigmatic look on Aaron's face which I had seen in the past? That look when he had said goodbye before going away for a day or two, that look that appeared on his face every time something personal in our lives was mentioned. It was a stunned look. His eyes used to blink rather a lot, and he tried to control the reflex of his eyelids which made his nostrils dilate a little. He would cover his lower lip with his top lip, and sit or stand there, obviously under some great strain, unable to speak even when it was quite clearly his turn. His goodbyes were most amusing.

'Goodbye' he would say, and then add, 'And thanks'. I always replied that he had nothing to thank me for and that I hoped he'd have a pleasant journey, and so on. But he seemed never to hear any of my last words to him. The look on his face was usually an extension of the word 'thanks', which he kept up for almost an entire minute, which is a long time for any one expression. He did not take one's hospitality for granted, I thought, and in his tortured look there was a quality of gratitude which was most rare. He was letting one know, I felt, that though

the tragic memory of E.'s death was still foremost on his mind, one had helped him a little to overcome his bereavement. I remember discussing this subject with him one night when we came back from the Café. Ria was very tired and went into the house, while the two of us remained sitting in the car.

'You know', he said to me, 'I shall be grateful to you for the rest of my life'.

One is a fool if one doesn't like to hear this sort of gratitude, and one is equally a fool if one believes it. I told him to lay it on soft.

'No, I mean it. Gee, I don't quite know how to put it. You know', he said, 'I can sleep at night now. For a long time, I couldn't, cos I . . . I just couldn't. But now, somehow you know, my brother's death isn't so terrifying any more. And I never thought I'd get over it'. He was playing with the rubber bands on his wrists. I remember that night, he wore two of them, a red one and a green one, and he was twanging them against his knuckles, giving himself a kind of miniature flagellation like flies when they beat their wings against their trunks before they take off. 'I would never have thought it possible that there could be a house in the whole world where one could walk in and find all the things one has lost. It's like a miracle, for I wake up each morning thinking that today will mark the return to misery. I wake up in terror, and I go to bed in peace'.

I was very pleased to hear this. 'Why should you feel this terror in the morning?' I asked him.

'I don't know', he said, and at that moment the enigmatic look once more came over his face.

'Look', I said, 'since you've come to our house, my life has changed too, and so, I'm sure, has Ria's. Permanence of relationship one feels only with someone one loves deeply and with members of one's family. I've never had a brother, but I feel like one towards you. It's a great increase to my life. I suppose it happens only once in one's

whole life, and only then if one is really lucky. But I can't now envisage the future without you, and that applies whether you stay in our house for the rest of your life or whether you go to Timbuktu. And if I look upon it as a permanent relationship, I don't see why you can't. So why wake up in terror?'

'Thanks', he said.

'And I'm sure Ria feels the same', I said.

I remember thinking what a lot of crap I was talking. Whenever one is trying to be most profound, one always talks a lot of rot. Words and living never marry. He understood this. As I've said before, he was a most sensitive man. He changed the subject abruptly as if he were trying to put a frame round the picture which he felt at that moment was complete and to which nothing could be added. He started to discuss the political situation, which he did, in fact, whenever he could think of nothing else to say.

We went into the house and to the kitchen to find a snack before going to bed. The Scotch horse in our kitchen is filled every night with the children's washing hung up to dry. It is a sweet and touching sight.

'You know', he said to me, 'if ever you want me to go, you just tell me'.

I said, Yes, I would, but I had really no idea why or when I should exercise the choice he offered me.

I find the fact that I did not even talk about what Klein had told me, absolutely in keeping with my stupid blindness. At this late stage, there was no point in talking about it. The fact that Klein had told me a year after it had started was like my friend's disease being diagnosed a year after it had begun. There is no consolation in any kind of deception.

Regarding my fear of death, there is something which has often struck me with intense horror. How can old people go on living, and what will happen to my fear as I get older? Whenever I see an old person, I ask myself,



'What on earth are his thoughts now he has not much longer to go?' My father, who knows of my fear of death, quite often jokes with me about his own death. I don't think he realises what this does to me, how I dread entering his mind when he plays about in this way. How, I think at these moments, can he go on living when he knows that soon he must die? He is old now, and not quite so strong any more, but in spite of his age, he is exceedingly active, if only to overcome this very same dread he feels about his death. I know this to be true. For why do you think he nowadays tells people that he is an ordinary man when in actual fact he is a most extraordinary person? Isn't it because he wishes to make himself small in the sense that a man is small, a speck of dust in the universe, into which he will dissolve when he dies and disintegrates by way of fire or the grave? Yet I also know, and this more so as I grow older, that everything passes. One doesn't feel this fear all the time. There is a technique of living with which a man is born, which helps him all the time to overcome every kind of terror. And what, after all, is deception compared to the great horror of death to which one is continually exposed? The technique of survival is to recognise the present as sensuality, and the past as meaning.

This being so, I can now see quite clearly, I indulged in sensuality because I wanted to ward off the past as long as possible. Not that I was aware of this at the time. But I now know I did exactly that.

## XII

At about the time I am trying to describe Aaron bought a 35 mm. camera. I remember him bringing it into the house, full of excitement, with the look on his face of a naughty boy who doesn't mind appearing naughty because he feels that what he's done is a challenge for the expiation of his little sins.

'That's the baby. Got it cheap' he said. 'You know I've been trying to get one of these for months'.

I had had no idea of this, nor had Ria. He was playing with the rubber bands round his wrists

'Are they hard to get?' I asked, quite innocently.

'Hard to get? You kidding? There are only about four in this bloody country: I almost had to kill a guy to get this. They're German. Now I've got to get a tripod, light-meter, and all the flipping editing equipment'

'You going to make films?' Ria asked

'Am I going to make films, she asks. No I'm going to use it for cooking'.

'I should think your knowledge of both these subjects would be about equal', I said.

'You're f . . . g right'. He now had a hurt look on his face. He often attacked, and when one hit back there always came a point when he caved in, became soft, charming and serious.

'Surely you knew I was going in for making films' he said, more to Ria than to me

'I had no idea', she said.

'But we discussed it together. We've often talked about it. What the hell?'

'You must be mixing me up with someone else', she put in, with anger in her voice.

'Why no, don't you remember I said I wanted to make

a film, I even described some of it, the night we saw Terra Trema? Don't you remember what I said?'

'All I remember you talking that night is a lot of rubbish. You agreed with me a few days later'.

'Yeah, but I said I wanted to make a film'.

'When I see a picture of a mountain I want to climb it', Ria said. 'But I should hate to be a mountaineer. How do you explain that?'

'You're not serious now. I've thrown in my job'.

'You've what?'

'Yeah, I quit making god damn records. The firm was going bust, anyway'.

It is amazing how much so called 'real action' impresses women. I think they instinctively feel that when a man is engaged in action, whatever it may be, he has to rely more on them, and they like that

'So where do we go from here?' Ria asked.

'I suppose I buy some rolls of film, and practice all day shooting goddam pictures'

'Does Klein know?' Ria asked.

'No I've discussed it with no one. It's a decision I had to take on my own'.

Exactly what it means to take a decision on one's own I've never understood. In the same sense that you live in your own body you make decisions on your own. Everybody does that all day long. But nobody takes decisions without taking into account a thousand influences. If one didn't one wouldn't have to decide anything. I'm always suspect of people who use that phrase. Of course it pleased Ria to hear that Aaron hadn't discussed the matter with anyone else.

'What about shooting the Holy Week in Seville next Easter?' Ria suggested.

'Yeah. That's what I mean'. Aaron said, trying to prove his point that he'd obviously talked about the idea before.

'Yeah', he said, 'We can all go down. Boy, what a film you can shoot there. It's just waiting to be shot. That's

what I talked to you about. Don't you remember, after Terra Trema?'

'You didn't. That night you talked about some lousy war film for which you had a story. But you never said you wanted to make films. The Holy Week idea is yours. You have talked a lot about it, it's true, but it was I who said that sort of thing would make a good film. All you did was to agree'.

'You've forgotten, baby'.

A lot of these quite inconsequential arguments went on all the time. After a while I took no notice of them. For a time one gives everybody a chance to talk sense. If it's not forthcoming one simply doesn't listen for it anymore.

He took up his work in a serious way. He spent a great deal of his time lugging this heavy instrument about, and shooting all kinds of shots to get practice and proficiency. In those weeks he shot his first pictures. They were of the old women in our district. It was rather amusing to see these characters projected onto the screen which he had rigged up in his room. They didn't know, of course, that they were being put on film, and went on scratching their noses or flicking their sticks at some ridiculous obstacle on their way to the shops. He caught them looking at shop windows, and shot the expression on their faces from which one could read the impact the wares had on them. They were really most amusing little sequences on the screen, especially as we had seen some of these old women for years without ever having spoken to them or coming near to them in any way. Suddenly they were caught in this celluloid butterfly net, and one could observe them quite close at hand.

As I think of these first shots Aaron took of the old women, an interesting fact springs to my mind which adds colour to the motive which I feel sure influenced him to take up the craft of film-making. It is not a wild surmise to say that he liked to observe without being

observed, and to be observed at the same time. The victims he shot were ignorant of his activity, and the little crowds that gathered round him in the street watched this photographic sport with admiration, envy and awe. Everybody has his own form of ostentation, whether it is loud or silent, garish or subdued. All men crave somehow to show their gifts. But one suffers a sickening constriction of one's respect for someone who desires to be observed by means which are somehow not legitimate.

There were, of course, other reasons for Aaron to take up this work, very sound and genuine reasons of which I am sure he was not aware at the time. He had an exceedingly good ear for languages, which he could pick up at astounding speed. After four weeks touring in Italy one summer he spoke Italian with an uncanny colloquial fluency, though he couldn't write a word of it. The same was true of some other languages, and was proved once more when at Easter of the next year he went to Spain with Ria to make the film of the Holy Week. Why, then, should he not also possess the gift of acute and fast observation with his eyes? He did. Many of his shots were exceedingly clever, cunning and sensitive. In the beginning he was always surprised himself at the results he attained. This was a charming trait.

'Gee, look at that old bitch scratching the wart on her ugly nose. I wondered what the hell she was doing with her right hand whilst her left hand was quite cramped and her old feet sensuous like a young dancer's. I thought perhaps she was putting a sweet into her mouth. Scratching her bloody wart, she was, the old bitch'.

There was a lot of excited comment every time he showed something new on the screen.

You know how certain sights and smells evoke the most poignant memories at times of things long in the past. Suddenly an absolutely accurate picture of some part of your past comes to you, something which you had forgotten long ago and which by its poignant evocation

increases its stature in your mind. These memories are the fuel from one's accurate intuitive judgment. I mention this aside because when first I listened to these comments of excitement which accompanied the projection of these trial shots, the strong and powerful memory of someone I had known in my early youth came to my mind. The memory was of a man whom, through my family, I had known years ago. By profession he was in the sausage skin trade, and his great hobby was stamp collecting. His wife was a fat and untidy woman who was always talking about food, and their only son, who always had dirty fingernails, was training to become a chef. There was something obscene about the alimentary tract which ran through this family as a common symbol to all three. I am sure that the very same facet of their life which I found obscene inspired the old man to collect his stamps. This was something clean and perpetual, which counteracted this other element in his life which was contained only in cycles of varying hours of digestion.

The fact that Aaron reminded me so strongly of Mr. O. quite firmly convinced me that through the eye and mechanics of photography he was trying to collect things. Whether it was the sight of shiny celluloid which I might have subconsciously compared to the shiny gut of animals which evoked this memory, or whether it was something else he had in common with Mr. O., I cannot say. But that he wanted to amass a fortune of pictures is quite certain.

But by far the most important single factor which prompted Aaron to take up film making was Ria. That I didn't realise at the time, but now I know. Even the excuse they now had of going often to the cinema, of going all over London to see this or that old film, had something to do with it. Not, as you know, that I was hard to deceive. But a certain fear must have got into Aaron at that time which made him dig in a little more, made him choose even a profession which suited his

amorous desires. Above all, though, he needed Ria. He needed her for his work. What on earth could he do with all the pictures he shot? Who was going to give his pictures the shape they required to become anything other than amateurish details? He was the passive recorder, a hunter, the gasman who collects the pennies in the slot, the laundry-man, the collector in whatever field you like, the clerk of art, uncreative, the cuckoo who needed Ria to hatch his artistic, speckled eggs.

I noticed a rather charming detail at the time. It was that Aaron's face looked very much like a camera. There was a small hole in his nose, right at the tip of it, which had been there since we had known him. But now I noticed that it was quite deep and sore, without any sign of healing up. And his eyes were shifting about more than usual, which made his mouth a little agape. This he could now do because of the familiarity which had grown up between us all. Before, he had never dared to bare his ugly teeth for longer than was absolutely essential for talk and eating. Now as he was beginning to dream of shots and fame, he held his mouth open at times. His talk became more technical, more professional, as the jargon of film-making was both useful to him and easy to pick up. The word, 'film wise' appeared in his sentences at short intervals. I remember this distinctly, as I hate repetition. (This of course, as I am prone to it myself). It would be too boring to give examples of these film-making expressions or a list of them. They are harsh sounding, rather preciously smart, borrowed and artificial. I am prejudiced against any professional language. People who use it other than on the job always, yes, always, put second things first, and this is both sickening and suspicious. It is like the couples who canoodle in public. One suspects them of having nothing to say to each other in bed.

What I found exceedingly weird about the innumerable sequences Aaron shot in the beginning was their extraordinary disjointedness. This wouldn't have bothered me

had I not recognised something very strange about it. With my untidy mind, until I allow mental sloth to overcome me as weeds do an untended garden, I try to create some form of order for myself by way of recording into a notebook ideas and thoughts which strike me as interesting, and which I feel are, for me, important. Obviously I record only ideas of a certain calibre and some even of those I forget before I have had time to put them down. This usually occurs when I think the idea is so good and powerful that I am bound to remember it anyhow, or at least later on. But they disappear like the trout in some lakes which seem so easy to catch until one has cast one's line. I reconcile myself to the loss of these ideas by thinking that they will come again, or that at least they must be in my subconscious now, where they will enrich my mind. I look upon them in fact, like the good farmer looks upon a crop of hay he ploughs back during a year he lets his crop lie fallow. But imagine recording everything? Yes, every single idea, and even every nuance of an idea. And imagine this done not by one's mind and effort, but by a technical trick on celluloid! I say by a trick, because I imagine the mind is used in this case simply as a catalyst. It does not in any way become enriched and capable of using the gathered material.

In our cellar at home, which Aaron used as an editing room, there was an endless footage of this material, literally hundreds of thousands of tiny pictures which needed coherence and form to attain any kind of meaning at all. They were cleared out only the other day when we threw out all the rubbish which had gathered in the cellar over the years.

Exactly how far Aaron had planned to use Ria for the co-ordination of his ideas, I cannot say. Ultimately everybody is responsible for his actions, and therefore, whether he plans them or not becomes of little interest. I think, however, that Aaron planned things more than other men,



because, as I was loath to discover more and more, he was badly handicapped by a lack of originality and imagination. Both his charm and his gifts were eclectic. I do not want to sound in any way malicious. It is only by the discovery of definite patterns of behaviour in people that one can hope to understand them.

What I cannot understand to this day is the deception of familiarity. I am thinking of the children's washing on the Scotch-horse, of my living with Ria in the night, which at times showed in the morning when our hair was less shiny and our eyes were a little dull and milky. I am thinking of our opinions too, of our attitudes to many questions, to many people; we discussed everything very freely, absolutely unfettered by any kind of social reasonableness or form. And beyond all this, there was deception! By whom is it possible to be so deceived? By a brutal person? Yes. Only by a brutal person.

We were once driving in Aaron's car, when a pig of a driver tried to overtake him. It was fairly late at night, on a Sunday I remember, when the London streets are uncannily empty. The car finally succeeded in coming forward, and in order to pass us he cut slightly across Aaron's path. Aaron hooted and chased the car, hooting more and more, until finally the car slowed down and Aaron overtook it. Until then the matter was a joke. But Aaron too stopped, ostensibly to tell the driver off in his amusing American way. This was done of course for our amusement. But the driver and another man got out of their car and came over to ours. They started reprimanding him instead, and having got the better of him from the start, they had the satisfaction of doing most of the talking. He quipped back, which was all he could do, and they looked at Ria, then at me, whereupon I too shouted something at them, and they told us to go back where we came from. I then got out of the car to start fighting, but getting no support from either Aaron or a friend who was with us, and who really is not

prone to aggression, I did not persist against the two louts.

'Gee, what's the point of fighting bastards like that?' Aaron said.

'The only language they understand is violence'. I said.

'No, it bloody isn't. They're too damn stupid to understand why you hit them'.

'Rubbish', I said, 'a black eye teaches them more quickly than anything else to hold their tongue'.

'What the hell', he said, 'you knock the shit out of them, make their eyes swell as big as tits, and they go off feeling quite justified in what they've said. You've got to show these people dignity. Who was better? Gandhi or Hitler?'

To this sort of agitated nonsense one has no answer. There is suddenly so much confusion in the conversation that one is thrown off the bridge.

What was revealing in this incident was the desire for violence when Aaron raced the car and then the shrinking from it. I could relate countless similar incidents which occurred over the years which would show up this very same trait of non-violent brutality. Because that's what it was with Aaron. I am convinced now that he could watch someone die, whom he could prevent from dying, but that he could not directly kill anyone.

'They just dug their bayonets into the guards when we got there. And some of the bastards were growling all night long in agony, some for two days. Boy, did those bastards growl. The boys had worked out special techniques of making them die slow. What bastards they were too. Gee'.

'Did you kill any of them?'

'No, I didn't. I was concerned with the f . . . prisoners. Belsen wasn't a holiday camp where you could have fun'.

When he told me about his liberating entry into the camps, I didn't believe half the things he said. I couldn't imagine him at the spearhead of any liberating army, let

alone in the one which first reached those gates of hell. Of course, at first there was enough glamour attached to this liberating exploit for Aaron to use all means possible to belong to it, and although one imagines, stupidly, such an army to be full of idealists, one forgets that all armies have their stragglers, their fags and tea-boys, their tramps. You can see that I am trying to go to the most stupid, the most absurd lengths to understand the deception of familiarity, and the only way it makes any sense to me is to recognise Aaron to be a person of non-violent brutality. Brutality is a way of life, quite a legitimate way of life, whereas violence is only one of the many techniques of putting brutality into practice. This technique, perhaps out of cowardice, Aaron never acquired. I have. Perhaps that is why I did not understand what was happening with the clarity I am now trying to bring to this part of my life.

What happened at the beginning of Aaron's film making career is now not so difficult to understand. In both E. and Klein, he had come across creative people with whose world he had become familiar. The fact that their subject was literature ruled out that subject for him. A thief, unless he is an absolute idiot, must take precautions. Not that I would wish to call Aaron a thief. Far from it. The child is not a thief of its parents. Perhaps that's an unfortunate expression. In fact it is. But I'm too lazy to change it now. No. He was too sensitive to overcome the initial embarrassment to show his five-finger exercises to people who were masters in their subject. That I understand very well. I would never tell anyone much richer than me how much money I possess, though I would inflict this knowledge on people far less rich. That, I am sure, was one of the reasons why Aaron did not choose literature as a career. Another was a distaste for working alone, and the thoroughly unglamorous condition under which a writer works. It may be as absurd to list these reasons, as to give the ones which

inspired him to take up making films. My excuse for doing so is the fact that Aaron's choice affected me. As a writer, he could not have continued his relationship with Ria. As a film-maker, he had to. I will tell you why.

### XIII

As I am deeply involved in the affair I am describing, I am trying to be especially objective and fair. My placid nature provides me with no difficulty about this, though at one or two points, I notice that I have been almost malicious to Aaron, and that I must avoid at all cost. After all, I have really nothing to be malicious about. What is the point of an owl being malicious towards a cuckoo? Yes, or a tiger towards a zebra? Ha, you say, there he goes again. He thinks he's the tiger that devours the poor zebra. Not at all. If the zebra is foolish enough to be spotted by the tiger, if it is clumsy enough to come into the *orbit* of the tiger, then that's its own look out. I speak for myself and for Aaron. I have not yet learned to speak for the dead as well, and therefore the whole of life. Let me put it another way. I have a bottle of sleeping drugs in my pocket. It is a small bottle with a screw-top. It held 50 pills, and now there are only three left in it. I found it on the floor next to the bed on which Ria died. I carry the bottle in my trouser pocket, so that I can feel its hardness against my thighs. Who was responsible for making Ria unscrew the top of this little bottle and devour the sleeping draughts? Who here was the tiger or the zebra? My uncle, the one whose grave my father has not yet visited, carried a chestnut in his pocket since the time he had found it as a boy of five. He was a very superstitious man, and all his life he allowed no-one to touch this chestnut. Am I going to be the same about this wretched bottle with the three pills? Or will I smash it to the ground or hold it in my fist when I confront Fawkes, or simply throw it away into the river where it will sink harmless to the bottom, like the coffin we lowered ten days ago into the grave? This wretched bottle

will ruin every pair of trousers I wear. It is seven times the size of my uncle's chestnut. It makes a bulge in my pocket and people will ask what I carry there. But what do I care what people will think now? It is too late for that.

I am transgressing and the moment I do so, I get confused. I must not get confused. For once in my life, I must really insist on being quite clear in my mind. I am trying very hard, but I find it almost impossible. I think I shall soon give up and allow the weeds to grow. After all, mental sloth is a drug which makes harmless the agony of the mind. Yes, if in another page or two my confusion does not give rise to clarity, I shall give up. Perhaps you have been very clever and have read, as they say, between the lines. In that case, you will understand that the only thing that has kept me going until now is the fact that once one has written something down one is no longer under an obligation to remember it. That is the problem. How much can one forget, or, strangely enough, how much does one want to forget?

How can I forget how Aaron fussed about Ria at the time he started working with her on his films? In the kitchen, when she was preparing a meal, he went about adding vinegar here, discussing the quality of the oil, giving a tip for this or that dish, and being genially gay with her. It was the time when we had started to eat late, long after the children were in bed. Ria's cooking improved, with Aarons' encouragement, beyond recognition. I started to put on weight at that time. These late meals, from the point of view of my health, were a curse. The fact that there is nothing the matter with my glands, means that for me to put on weight is sheer weakness. That's why I didn't object to the timing of our evening meal. Besides, I liked eating late.

'God, gee Ria', he used to say.

'You like it?'

'Do I like it? Do I like it? Why, that's the best mayonnaise I've ever eaten. It's that oil. I told you. Pays to get

the best. Wonderful. She's really learning to cook. She'll get there yet'.

He was charming to her. He praised her doubly, once for her benefit, and once for mine. He really understood how to encourage her. One of my great failings is that, after the beginning, I do not encourage people. I always think they would take it as an insult, because it means constantly going over ground one has already covered. I hate repetition, but I'm wrong. Pride is all very well, but not if it takes one's humour away.

'And what've you done to the steak? It's marvellous', he went on at the next course.

'Nothing in particular', Ria said.

'Nothing in particular? Not much. You've put wine in the pan', he said, striking his meat with his fork in about a dozen different places, so that it looked like a wounded animal exuding blood.

'I haven't.

'You have'.

'Not a drop, honestly'.

'Well, it tastes as if you had'.

After a short break we could always rely on him to tell some kind of story. This was either a Bostonian convention or some other convention of politeness and good manners which I sadly lacked.

'I met a diver at a bar behind Leicester Square. I had to go into town today. . . .'

'What for?' Ria asked.

'To see a man about a bloody dog'.

'Why weren't you . . . ?'

'Do you want to hear about this diver or don't you?'

'Why weren't you working today? You said you were going to shoot another reel'.

'Supposing I did? Eh baby? I got some jolly good shots of the square. We'll need them'.

'Yes, we will'.

'This diver, gee, he was a red-head. A great big tall guy,

with enormous ginger eye-lashes. His body was straight as a die. He said they dive down about 550 feet, and he's even been down a thousand feet. 'Do sharks attack you?' I asked him, and he said, 'Myself, I reckon, no they don't'. The suit they wear hides their smell, 'cos that's what attracts the goddam sharks. Only their hands are bare, and if they gash themselves and bleed, the sharks might go for them. They feel nothing when they're down below, 'cos the pressure's so high. It must be marvellous, gee, to take a camera down there. Sometimes they do, and get shots of a wreck they have to work on. Sometimes when they come up too quick. . . '.

'To go home to Mum', Ria slipped in, laughing.

'Yeah, to go home to Mum. When they come up too quick, they get "diver's bend". That's what they call getting air bubbles in their blood through sudden pressure changes. If that happens, d'you know what they do? D'you know what they do with the sonofa bitch? They throw the bastard right back into the water. The bubbles leave their bodies when they reach the same pressure which bore on them when they were formed'.

It goes without saying, that the steak, so recently praised, and in whose honour this oration was being delivered, was by now lying cold and listless on Aaron's plate. After the first bite which had inspired the praise, the second tiny piece was still on his fork, which culinary instrument he was using at times to conduct part of his conversation.

'Do you know that they work with flames under water? Yeah, with a kind of blow-lamp. They measure depths in atmospheres. 33 feet is one atmosphere. He said at the depth of one atmosphere, it's most dangerous, because the pressure there changes more rapidly. After that the pressure changes diminish. When they're down to 550 feet, it takes three quarters of an hour for them to come up again. They come up in stages, so that their bodies get used to these changes'.



I'm sure that his diseased teeth were the reason he talked so much during meals. He must have formed the habit to overcome his shyness when eating, and as this neurosis was very strong, and his imagination insufficiently strong, he had to do a lot of padding. This padding, invariably, yes invariably, took the form of utter disjointedness. His talk was a kind of compulsive chain-reaction and by the end of what he said both he and his interlocutors often lost the motive which one imagined had inspired his talk. The reason why one lost this 'motive' is quite simple. There seldom was one. But somehow or other, one never suspected that. Good breeding had taught Aaron never to lay himself bare to ridicule. The rich and well-bred never have any difficulty in simulating eccentricity. The effect he produced with his conversation was various. His accent was attractive and endearing. The intelligence applied to within the confine of what he said was acute, and the way little subjects exploded from his mind like the radio-active particles from some atoms astounded one with the originality of his mind. With all that, his great charm and breeding made one feel thoroughly inadequate and proud to be in the company of so astute a mind. Where he did slightly unbalance this feeling of elation was in the timing of his talk and stories. He invariably went on a little too long, told his stories too slowly, and over-emphasised at the climaxes.

One would not think that a man so apparently well-versed in the ways of society had in him any degree of helplessness. But the buffoonery of the eclectic is at all times difficult to uncover. It hides weakness extremely well. It obviously fooled me for a considerable time. I don't think it fooled Ria. She was very quick at uncovering other people's faults, and as a rule, was ruthless, at times even unfair about this. But with Aaron, she did not let on about it until later on, until she used his weakness to show off her strength. It was then that I first took notice of what was going on about me.

With familiarity, everything becomes exposed. After a time it does not seem to be possible amongst people to keep up appearances, or rather, I think it is possible, even desirable, but people are overcome by mental sloth. Yes, that's all it is. For a long time, to give an example, I thought that Aaron was extremely well read. There certainly were a large number of books he discussed in a very clever way. As I've said before, he often invited one to possess greater knowledge than one had, and the number of books he implied that one had surely read could have filled a small library. The boldness and intelligence with which he expressed these implications made one loath to admit one's ignorance. I myself don't think there is anything more injurious to a relationship than the exposing of ignorance. And if someone's ignorance is exposed in public, one can feel nothing but sympathy for the injured party and hatred for the aggressor. Can you imagine the state of confusion I was thrown into every time I witnessed Aaron thus being exposed by Ria?

'If you compare Stendhal's novels with Dostoevsky's, you'll see what I mean', he once said apropos of some point in a discussion.

'Stendhal's heroes are all rich. They've all got plenty of cash. Whereas in Dostoevsky, they're all pretty poor. That's good enough for me to prove French greed and the Russian concern for the soul and the spirit. 'Russland grenzt an Gott', Rilke said and boy, he hit the nail right on the goddam head'.

'Have you been reading again?' Ria suddenly asked. There was a crowd of people around the table and whilst she'd been dishing out the food, she hadn't had time to join in the conversation, 'though she'd heard all the rubbish that had been spoken.

'Yeah, baby'.

'You're a quick reader, honey. Yesterday you said you'd never read one book by Dostoevsky, but since M. was talking about him the whole time, you would'.

'Yeah, yeah, sure. Why don't you get on with your food?' he joked back. 'Then you won't feel so weak. Gee, you believe anything one tells you. She's marvellous', he called out. 'Never read *The Idiot*, *Karamazov*? Why, I was reading that guy when you were playing truant the day they tried to teach you how to cook'.

Everybody was now beginning to laugh, although anybody who knew Ria and was looking at her face at that moment could have predicted that this laughter was the wind before the storm. There was only one way to allay it.

'Cut it out, Ria', I called right across the table.

'And what the hell were you reading whilst you were cooking the goulash?' he blurted out, poking his loaded plate with his fork, as if he had swallowed a worm and was looking for more.

'Let's have some bread and cheese instead'.

Ria went up to Aaron and started to pull his plate away. He was laughing.

'No, no. I didn't mean that. Take it easy, honey. You just didn't put enough salt in. It's very good really'.

It was too late. As I've said before, his timing was always bad. Everyone's laughter had become uneasy, and the more the atmosphere became tense, the louder and more gross was Aaron's behaviour. But he was quite oblivious to the effect he created, which was one of complete embarrassment on everyone. Ria, who was trembling with rage, pulled away his plate and carried it out into the little kitchen. She came back and sat down, and without looking at Aaron, started eating and playing at hostess. One could see she was loaded and victorious. One false move from Aaron now and she would clout him with whatever object was nearest to her. But if he played his cards right, she would sooner or later look at him, and laugh with her whole face. At that he always succeeded in the end. I say always, because this sort of thing happened quite often and it happened always that way round. It was always Aaron who got the stick, and with this

repetitious pattern of behaviour went the precarious enjoyment which both the pupil and the master derive from punishment. Witnessing these harangues of aggression mostly neutralised my feelings. On the one hand, I was sorry for Aaron when he was subject to these fierce attacks, and on the other hand, I admired Ria's spirit and fierceness. Apart from the embarrassment these attacks caused at times, they were pleasant enough to witness.

I must here, in all honesty, mention one point, which to some extent, at least, explains the lackadaisical attitude I adopted to this whole affair. I felt myself to be entirely superior to Aaron. It was a matter of conceit and assurance, and this feeling was enhanced in a very mundane way by the sheer number of our friends. We had become a household 'à trois' and wherever we went, Aaron came too. After many months, this had become the accepted thing, and I, for my part, found nothing whatsoever strange in it, and only much later on did I discover that some of our friends did. I feel that I am digressing again. As soon as I let go, even for a moment, this happens. The ground is suddenly covered with oil and I slip all over the place.

What was it that made me so lackadaisical apart from my conceit? It was that I too, apart from Ria, was Aaron's teacher. Yes. It is monstrous to have to say this, but it is quite true. Ria and I had been aggressive to each other for years, but Aaron had not yet learnt how to play the game. Ria was a wild woman, quite unpredictably wild at times, and sulks and weakness did not make any impression on her. You had to counter-attack her hard, or attack her yourself without warning, to make her submit in any way. Women prone to depression are like that. They find relief in nothing but the tension which involves them with someone else.

Once, for a short while, I was in love with a married woman. Ria and I had known her for some time before her marriage and although I had always liked her

a great deal, love had not entered my feelings for her until one day I stayed with her and her husband after they had settled in G. Seeing her live close by, in the next room, and watching the manipulations of her everyday life, aroused in me a strong attraction for her, which was, I now believe, raised to the degree of genuine infatuation by the challenge of her husband. He was a most lovable, kind and amusing person, but he was clumsy with her. And the basest thing that I remember about the whole affair was that I watched and studied his clumsiness. Whenever he was loutish or uncouth, I moved a step nearer to her, until one day the aroused passion made us, for a day, quite blind and cruel to his feelings. Apart from some letters I wrote to her after I had got back to London, nothing further happened between us. The distance we were apart from each other helped to extinguish our desire. But I think that even without this distance between us, the affair would have broken up, though perhaps not quite so soon. I am convinced of this because the husband played the challenger, and as far as I was concerned once the affair was consummated in any way, the challenge was broken.

I am quite willing to reveal everything about myself, to make an utterly true confession. No-one can dig out the ore of understanding from his brain without confession. But the confession has to be ruthless, quite ruthless. Perhaps I should confess here that when Aaron came into our lives four years ago in June, I was glad of his coming, because he was enabling me, in a most subtle and even gentle way, to get rid of Ria. Perhaps if this were a fictitious story, one could invent such a confession. But it would not be true. What is true, though, is that by June, four years ago, Ria and I had been married for eight years. After eight years of marriage, if you're not on your guard, you settle down, like a jelly which is getting cold. You become a feast for your children and a customer for a pair of warm slippers. You start work on the pre-

servation of your body, by observing the function of your liver, the pressure of your blood, and so on. You become the refugee from youth, bringing with you a few miserable belongings which you finger and discuss all day long, because you feel suspended between nostalgia and the suspicion that soon you will die. You start buying clothes which are durable and expensive as some kind of absurd legacy for eternity, because, I am sure, you have it in mind that these clothes will outlive you. This submission to age, or the fight against it, has all, of course, to do with one's attitude to death.

## XIV

The obsession to stay young starts young. The first injury to one's dream becomes the wound which one continues to inflict on oneself. After a time, I suppose at the stage one calls maturity, one becomes immune to all new injury, but one goes on being wounded and wanting to be wounded because pain has become involved with pleasure. That is the most obscene and sad stage of life. When women grow old and when men go down the other side of ambition, there is nothing left for them to achieve but dignity. Between this first wound and dignity, man fights death, the unalterable end of life, with whatever wit, conscious or unconscious, he possesses. Perhaps all this is trite. But I, for the tremble at the thought of death, and am of an age when to fight my greatest enemy without shame or dignity does not yet make me despair because of its futility.

It was because of this obsession to stay young, that I was glad of Aaron's coming. I don't of course mean young in the sense that women want to stay young. I mean by young anything that's unfinished, incomplete, hopeful of further growth. Quite frankly, if Aaron had not come and infused new tension into our relationship, Ria and I would have been finished years ago. We'd had marriage and children when we were very young, and what the hell were we supposed to do with one another for the rest of our lives? Instinctively we both knew this, and instinctively we allowed ourselves to drift into the situation which was ultimately the cause of tragedy. But that wasn't our fault. I say this quite bluntly, but it should be obvious why I say it, and why, in spite of what I say, I was blind to what was going on. Obvious it is, in case you can't read my character sufficiently by now, because I don't see

or feel people in the flesh. I like reading about people (Biographies are my favourite books), and I suppose I like inventing people for myself. I often try desperately hard to think myself into other people, because I think that to be able to do this, is somehow a test of oneself to feel other people. But I can't. I've tried it even with my eldest child. I love no-one in the world more than my two daughters, but even with them I can't succeed at making myself feel what they feel. The elder one moves me the moment I start thinking about her. Photographs of me at her age show a really striking resemblance. And I really *feel* she looks as I did. I also look like my father, very much so in fact. I have the idea in my mind that if one of us three takes a pin and pricks a finger, we should all be able to feel it because we're all alike. But I do not feel my daughter's hurt; my father's I do. He is the only living creature in the world with whose feelings I am absolutely familiar. I can literally feel, say, the effect on him when a letter is being put through the slit of our letter-box in the office. I know that if I can hear the faint thud of a falling envelope, he can hear it too, and I know what he feels about this tiny unimportant sound. In fact, I feel burdened by the knowledge of his feelings, because I feel I am being watched all the time. It would be facile to say that one's sensitivity towards other people is caused by one's guilt toward them. That would mean that as one desires to be sensitive towards a particular person, one would develop one's guilt towards that person. This certainly makes sense, but I am (a) too lazy, and (b) too stupid, to decipher why it is nonsense. Because it is nonsense. For how can one separate, unless one is talking of cretins, love from passion? And why should love dress up a Mephistopheles as guilt?

I will tell you how I remember that I was glad when Aaron came to our house. Through him, I was able to see Ria in a new light. He stimulated her, and my clumsy silence was able to feed its greed for more and more



silence. A man who stutters, stutters more than ever if he is frightened into thinking that his speech causes embarrassment. And so a silent person becomes even more silent when all the time he is accused of engendering boredom. Don't for god's sake think that I'm crying out with self-pity. Not at all. A man as stupid and as blind as I am doesn't get hurt so easily. Besides, I myself accepted long ago that to accept me, people would have to accept my long unbroken moods of silence. I can clown about too, but very often, I am silent. I can pull faces. In fact, I often practice making faces in front of a mirror. Now I think of it, I don't think I've ever looked into a mirror when I've been alone, without making some face or another. I sometimes get genuinely depressed because I find the number of faces I can make is extremely limited. Yet I daresay, that because of my constant practise, I can distort my face more successfully than many other people. And yet, how many times have I been told, very often by complete strangers; 'Don't look so sad!' And that I've been told when, I know, I've just looked my ordinary normal self. Is it because I have a sad face that I love clowns and clowning? When I was a child, I was told that all clowns are really sad people. Am I perhaps a clown?

There's no doubt that Aaron stimulated Ria from the moment he set foot in our house. For quite a long time, she thrived on his stimulation in a way which enabled her to bring new experience from outside to the inside of our marriage. I say for a time, for a very important reason. For perhaps one year, to be a little more precise, she brought things back to me. After that I didn't particularly want to hear any more. I didn't know why I didn't want to hear any more at the time, but I know now. I had lost my hold over her. I'm not sure whether I've made myself clear. Let me put it in another way. With all my relationships with women, I've been the sculptor at work on raw stone. I want, I suppose, to create some kind of ideal vision of them, and this creation is very much part of my

joy of loving. It is a stupid and clumsy way of loving women, but fetishes of both mind and body are bearable only if ultimately one accepts them as part of oneself. But what I felt after a year or so of Aaron's co-habitation with us, was that he was taking over work which I had started. Does it sound strange if I say that I witnessed this with a great feeling of joy? Psychologists would talk bunkum for hours about this confession. All that interests me is that it had to do with my vision of all women as children. I want to know of all women what they were like as children. Perhaps the reason for this is that as children, they could not possibly have been cruel. Or is it that one is always looking for love, and if one wants to love, one wants to love for ever, and that, in order to increase the terrible constriction of time, one looks not only ahead, but backwards too?

When one has produced something from which other people can derive benefit, one feels proud and strangely satisfied. How else can a man stand working, say, in a slate-mine for twenty years, hewing the rock out of a chamber which increases its size only by his labour? He works, deep down, in the bowels of the Welsh earth, so that a man can roof his dwelling. Does he not sometimes add the depth he is down to the height of the house for which his slates will be used, and arrive at the height of the spire of Salisbury Cathedral, built for the glory of God? I felt with Ria, that such a growth took place, and I watched it being borrowed from me. Yes, one could say that I lent Ria to Aaron, 'though I felt only the emotion of this and not the reality and did not foresee the consequence. I am cold, callous and unfeeling, which disgusting characteristics enable me to be generous in my behaviour. Weak emotions are like the backcloth of luxury; they give an illusion of splendour.

There was, however, a further reason why Aaron succeeded in his manoeuvres to win Ria. I was hankering after new tension. Yes, I wanted to infuse my life with

Ria with new tension. The fact that this desire was reckless and fraught with real danger, made it even more enticing. To regret the recklessness of this desire is easy enough now. But who, when he wants to test all the possibilities of life, is cautious in his rage against death?

In going over these weeks and months which I am here putting under the magnifying glass, in order to see them more clearly, I remember two sheets of paper on which I had written the beginning of some story or novel. In itself, the piece is quite ridiculous and stylistically bad. But it is of real significance to me at this point. To quote it here is probably as reckless as my encouragement of Aaron. But I don't care. As I said right at the beginning, I find it imperative to commit myself to paper to attain any clarity about myself. That was as true when I wrote this fragment at the time, as it is today.

'I have killed my wife', it starts, 'yet she died of her own accord. I am terribly afraid because I have no hope that they will understand; that is, in broad daylight (though very little of this penetrates the chalk-smeared, barred window of my cell) I do not hold that they can be convinced of my innocence. Though at other times, when the mind comes more fully into its own, I do still hope that man will comprehend, will deduce that what has happened to me was as natural as the growth of some plant which has grown in the wrong place and which is therefore assigned the malignant term of weed. If only I could be sure of convincing the judge, whose possible method of assessing guilt or innocence I have tried to mime during the past few nights, or my father, sister, uncle, friends, acquaintances, but above all the public, the world which will follow my case in the newspapers with avid appetite, because my disaster will show up their apparent security. If only I could convince these people of my innocence. I know that to convince them of this would be a tremendous triumph for me and Katz, the lawyer I have engaged to fight for my life. Katz told me

yesterday or the day before that my chances are very good. He spoke in a very confident tone which has driven me almost to despair. I thought that during the past fortnight or so, seeing him for several hours every day and briefing him as best I could and in great detail, I had won him over to my side, not as a defender of my life, but as a man. And yesterday, or whenever it was I saw him last, he spoke to me with professional slickness, as to a client, which to me was tantamount to telling me that my chances are very slim. I believe that in spite of what I have told him, he still looks upon my action as a crime. And so of course, will the judge; even if he be a Solomon, for Solomon did not have to judge after the killing of a human being. A corpse inveigles you to be termed a criminal in the minds of everybody and because of this it counts as at least ten first rate witnesses against you before you start. Katz was the last tangible hope, but he has failed me'.

I then went on describing Katz in some detail, probably because I was going to make him an important character in the piece. I can't think why now, but probably that was the reason. Then it went on: 'In my mind, there is no question as to my innocence. If only I had the chance of convincing one man, I would then cherish the hope of not having to die according to some arbitrary arrangement of society. It could be done through the spy-hole of my cell, talking to one of the two warders who are continually keeping guard over me. But when first they brought me here, and thrust my privacy into their hands, I was overcome with a feeling of repulsion against them. I hated them, and I have forgotten what they look like, although I see them several times a day. I *am* trying. I now eat the food they bring me. But will there be enough time before my case is tried for the warders and myself to gain equal footing. The only level ground on which communion between two men can take place? I am afraid not. I am afraid. I would look upon finding such a mate

of mind as a miracle, and as my time decreases, so must grow the magnitude of this miracle'.

I have quoted this fragment because its date coincides with the mood I am trying to describe here. I had forgotten all about it until the other day, and was astonished when I read it. After what has happened, there is something prophetic about the piece. I refer not only to the tragic event which has taken place, which the fragment already assumes to have taken place. Far more strange is my desire to be heard and understood, which arises directly out of my desire for judgment. That desire has not changed and will not change one iota until it has been fulfilled.

## XV

Three years ago in April, Ria and Aaron went to Spain to film the Holy Week in Seville. Near the time of departure there was great excitement in the house. The excitement was beautifully played up. The final decision for Aaron to take Ria with him, was left dangling in the air until about a fortnight before they finally left. It is an enchanting pastime of the civilised, those, that is, who have the time for it, to enhance all excitement to the utmost degree. I remember Ria asking me several times a day, like a child trying to find out its birthday presents beforehand, whether I thought Aaron would really take her along. He himself was a master of non-commitment and he essayed all the possibilities of keeping her in suspense right until the end. 'D'you think you'll be able to stand the heat down in Southern Spain? And what about the grub, eh? Everything cooked in goddam oil. Boy, you'll be spending all day in the you-know-where!' Those were the sort of questions he asked her. He never sincerely challenged her desire to go with him, but his conversations with her in my presence were spattered with suggestions of doubt as if to test her strength of will. It is easy to think now that all these ridiculous preambles were put on for my benefit, and that Aaron was waiting for me to object to Ria's going. The thought never entered my head.

'Of course I can stand the heat, and the food . . . '.

'Yeah, the food's O.K. I guess, if you can eat your own cooking, why, you can stand anything. What about fainting tho'? You likely to faint when we do the bullfights? Can you stand the sight of goddam blood, human or animal? 'Cos there'll be plenty of that. At the end of the week, there's a great *fiesta taurina*. Jesus Christ, is that a splendid sight, the Matador in his *trajes de luces* leading

in his gang of killers, the *banderilleros*, and the *picadors* on their padded horses And the crowds What a marvelous sight'

'What about shooting the bull fight through the eyes of the bull?' Ria suggested

'Yeah, that's exactly what I had in mind Never show the bloody bull at all, just everybody's reaction to it

'What about the Holy Week? Have you found out what it's all about?'

'No, I haven't', he admitted rather embarrassed, a week before going off to make the film 'I can't find any books about it, or find anyone who knows anything about it

'That's impossible', I said

'I've tried the library and a couple of bookshops Klein says he's got a book somewhere where I might find something about it In any case we'll find out all about it when we get there That is, if we get there

'Why shouldn't you?'

'Cos the Spaniards for some reason don't like you taking great big cameras into their country They confiscated some sound tracks of a friend of mine

Having finally agreed to take Ria, he then started to throw doubts on the whole journey About five days before they left though the whole journey really became finalised Unfortunately I did not realise the irony of the situation which arose else I would have derived much pleasure from the joke The wife of a friend of ours had recently recovered from a nervous breakdown and during dinner at their house about three weeks before, this Spanish journey had been described with great and infective enthusiasm by Aaron Now five days before the departure, the husband came to Aaron and Ria and asked whether they would object if his wife came with them on this wonderful journey because she needed a holiday I only realise now the predicament this impertinent demand created It is also, incidentally an intriguing speculation, whether or not this demanding couple were aware of the

predicament they were causing, and knew, because of this, that their request could not be refused. For what could Aaron or Ria have said? That there was no room in the car? What could they have said without making their desire to be alone public and suspect? They took the wretched woman along and cursed her for three thousand miles.

I had several letters from Ria. She wrote excellent letters in a sharp, informative, and amusing style. I also had a letter from Aaron. I've looked for it all over the place but I cannot find it anywhere. Perhaps he went through the drawers of my desk one day and took it back. But I remember the letter quite well. It had a lot in it about Spain, God and death, and a long page on the bull's survival instinct and how this survival instinct of the bull was part of the symbol of Europe, a culture in 'pessimistic decay'. Some warped theories look quite good on paper, but when one thinks about them, and one begins to find one objection after another, one loses interest. What I did find interesting in the letter were two passages. One stated that they had taken hundreds of feet of film, but since there was no processing possible in Southern Spain they had no idea whether any one frame even had a picture on it. The other passage described, in glowing terms, a brotherly love for me, an enormous gratitude, and in somewhat masochistic terms, a desire to be told what he could do for me, ever, at any time, and a repetition of his desire to be told to leave the house, if my need for his departure should ever arise. In a P.S. there was a rude remark about the third passenger.

Judging by the knowledge I now possess of their relationship at the time they went to Spain, I cannot help feeling a delayed shock of anger. I am angry not because I was so blind, but that my blindness was used by them to play a trick on me. It reflects an unscrupulousness, which makes children sometimes trick their crippled comrades into an act of folly for which they hope the unfortunate culprit



will not be punished because of his disability. Imagine this crippled child becomes cured later on in life and then reflects on some act of folly he has committed and discovers that he was egged on by his friends only because of his erstwhile disability? Won't he feel sick in the stomach and retch at the thought of having been a hero for their amusement? I have asked myself many times, how they can have loved one another in the house in which I lived, with the Scotch horse sagging each night under the weight of the children's washing, and how could they have gone to Spain without their conscience spoiling the pleasure they sought in each other? They played on my feeling for nostalgia and this made everything safe for them.

When I was fourteen, I was made to leave the German town where I was born. It was an old, beautiful town and to be torn away from it was most painful. We left early one morning in April. It was a cold April that year, and the town, as we drove to the station, looked hard and windswept. Perhaps it was sentimentality that made tears come to my eyes, though I like to think that it was the disappointing view of our town that made me cry on that terrible morning. Suddenly however, the town, through my tears, once more looked soft as its sandstone, gleaming in the dawn, with the cathedral by the river rising high into the sky, its spire the nearest point to God for miles around. I remember the wind-blown ripples on the river, which, at the moment we crossed the bridge, looked like a host of birds taking off for the South in search of warmer lands. Beyond the river, I did not look at our town any more. My thoughts, I remember quite clearly, were occupied with the canary I had left behind in a cage in my room. A few days ago, the following ideas had occurred to me: the bird knows its cage intimately. It knows how many spokes there are around it, it knows the faint squeak of its swing, which side of the cage is more sheltered than the other. It knows the little food and water troughs and the cuttlefish with which its beak has become familiar. There's

nothing else to be known about its cage, so that if that were all a bird knew, it would die from boredom. Some birds do. Birds whose dreams can't take wing, are condemned to die. If we leave our town, I reasoned, then we go out of one cage into another. When we go from our town to our dreams, then our town will become our dreams.

I mention this only to prove that I am familiar with nostalgia. For a person like me, crippled with the blindness I have been describing, the past is the rod by which others can measure my immediate reactions. The moment I am away from anybody close to me, I begin thinking of this person with a nostalgic intensity, which even now, after all the lessons I have learnt, frightens me. This is further proof to me that the pattern of one's behaviour and thoughts never changes.

The moment Ria and Aaron had left for Spain, I started to read the weather reports for the Hispanic Peninsula and went to the Public Library to look at books on Seville, so that I could get a clearer picture of their surroundings. And I planned all kinds of changes in the house, which I wanted to effect in their absence, embellishments and improvements I wanted to have our bedroom redecorated, and new lights fitted I even enquired about a new bed because, in ours, the springs were worn. I wanted to have our barren garden replanted by a gardener with green fingers who would put in flowers which would not wither the moment they were embedded in our arid ground. I have grown to be too unfeeling and insensitive a person to be in any way sentimental, yet I have had exactly similar ideas during the last ten days. I sometimes lie on the old bed, and when I turn and hear the noise of those wretched rusty springs, a quite ridiculous idea comes to my mind. A man who lost a leg in the war described to me a strange feeling which at times overcomes him. His left leg was amputated just below the groin, and the wound, although healed, is so sensitive that he cannot

wear an artificial limb. At times he feels his leg is still there, and he makes, without his crutches, as if to walk around. He described to me that just before he makes such a walking movement, he is fully aware that he has no leg on one side, but that nevertheless, as if by some reflex, he has to walk forward on his 'phantom limb' even if it means that he will fall. Once or twice lately, I have thought of buying a new bed.

When one is thinking of people with nostalgia, one does not think badly of them. The mood is paramount to one's thoughts and therefore it is impossible to suspect or to doubt the behaviour of the people for whom one is nostalgic. As surroundings are lost to a woman looking into a mirror, so one's mood becomes the face one looks at.

You may say to me at this point: 'But all this is nonsense. What you're doing is twisting the fact that you did not love your wife. Instead of a real flower, you've got hold of an artificial one whose horrible petals you are spraving with cheap scent. How else could nostalgia have replaced jealousy which would have immediately led you to discover everything, which would have guided you to suspicion, which would have made you tear assunder the relationship which was going on right under your very nose? All I can say is that it wasn't so. I've questioned myself many times whether I loved Ria, and I even re-read *De L'Amour* four times to find out if our relationship fitted into one or other of the categories of love Stendhal described with his uncanny accuracy. I have never found the answer, and even now, as I try to unravel the confusion in my mind, I cannot find the answer to this question. This does not unduly worry me. The word love is so vague a word that not two people exist who mean the same thing by it.

Quite frankly, I have never known what to do with love. Essentially I like things which last, and my attitude towards love may appear unrealistic and romantic. But that

isn't my fault. Let it stem from ignorance. Believe me, I've tried as hard as others to love properly, right from the start. Yet I didn't know how to behave with the first woman I desired, and to whom I came close. Explain that. Why didn't I know? I've cursed my initial ignorance ever since that time when I was a student in love. It was like being in the middle of a forest around which rages a fire which draws closer every day. You neither move from this centre, nor do you want to move. It is like the hypnosis of fire, first the lulling of the heat, then the desire to escape and the desire to succumb, which desires cancel one another. Like a dream, it never ends. The fall off the cliff or the drowning is interrupted by awakening. In love, you survive only because it does not last. What does last, like the old town I left, is the nostalgia and the dream. I remember quite distinctly that when Ria left for Spain, or whenever she went away from me, I missed her because I could dream of her. And more than at any time, I have missed her these last ten days. But I know, I know your accusation. I have weak emotions, and therefore, I have to dream to escape reality. I agree with you. But you must also agree with me that when I dream, I come to love.

## XVI

When they came back they unloaded Spain from the car and brought it into the house. They had dropped the third passenger first and said she had picked her nose for three thousand miles. Ria was sunburnt, black almost, and ablaze with happiness, and Aaron embraced me and laughed like a true man of passion. When I say that they unloaded Spain I don't mean that they brought a thousand trinkets like some wretched tourists, but that they had about them some atmosphere of a hot country, some part of the place they had visited which was delightful to see. Only people with a true feeling of insecurity can absorb knowledge and wisdom from travel. Aaron and Ria's situation, particularly with a chaperone, enhanced this natural feeling of insecurity and made them wild with enthusiasm which they were anxious to share with us.

I remember I watched them arrive from the window of my study. I watched the children run out and yelp with delight like young dogs who are teased to perform before being given a lump of sugar. Then I walked slowly downstairs to greet them. I don't know what it is about me, but I always behave coldly on occasions where passion is not out of place. In fact, I behave in a manner I would bitterly criticise in anybody else. I cannot act out my dreams. That's what it is. I suddenly feel ashamed and afraid and I withdraw into myself and become thoroughly objectionable and, what is worse, ridiculous. Because for hours before, for days and weeks sometimes, I dream of a particular moment to come, and my mind, embellishing all things wonderfully, whets the appetite and spurs on the hunger by even greater embellishment. But I forget always that this moment I dream of is equally in the mind, and has been embellished for the mind and not for reality.

I have not yet become familiar with the demarcation between reality and dream. I don't think I shall ever get to know the frontier, and as all the time I cross and re-cross it unwittingly, I am constantly in danger of being shot at or arrested. In fact, I am so constantly in danger that I am quite immune to it. I am afraid, in fact, only of revealing my dreams. There attaches shame to this fear.

During the time they had been away, an American woman called Lucy Gilmour had rung up several times. I don't know why she rang up so often because every time she was told that Mr. Fawkes wouldn't be back in London until such and such a date. Apparently she didn't believe this, so 'that American Lady' as the children called her, made test calls until we were sick of her voice. It was a voice peculiar to some American females; rather high-pitched and soft, with a strong drawl and terribly slow. If snails had human voices, they would speak like that.

'Who's Lucy Gilmour?' I asked Aaron at dinner that night when I remembered the phone calls.

'Why? Has that bitch been ringing the house every five minutes?'

'Yes'.

He laughed.

'Didn't you ring her before we left for Spain?' Ria asked, smiling but quite adamant.

'No, I didn't. I meant to', he said, rather shyly, like a naughty boy before chuckling to himself, partly for our benefit.

'I really meant to. But I plain forgot. So the bitch's been ringing all the time, eh? Five times a day? Eh. . . .'

'Not quite. About two or three times a week. Who is she?'

'Bob's sister. She's over here on a visit'.

Bob was an old friend of his from school. I hadn't known his surname. Ria, apparently knew all about her.

'You're a real louse. There she is, pining away for dear little Aaron, she comes all the way from America to see

you, and you flit off for five weeks without even telling her'.

'Yeah, yeah, cut out the sob-stuff. She's old enough to know better. I should have called her before I left. Gee, how d'you like her voice?' he asked me, bursting out laughing.

'Pretty puny. She gives me the willies. "Hi, it's Lucy Gilmour. Can I speak to Aaron please?"' I said, trying to imitate her tawdry voice.

'Yeah, she's got a voice like a bloody fish'.

'What does she do?'

'What does she do? Her? Do? Why, nothing. She ain't got no time to do anything. It takes her all day to finish one sentence, Boy, is she fast'.

'You must give her a ring', Ria said. She was always admonishing him for his social lapses, sometimes kindly, sometimes in a rough and rude manner.

The next day, he announced that he'd rung her, 'Yeah, I did ring her. About half after eleven this morning'.

'Aren't you going to see her?' Ria asked.

'We're all going to see her. Is Thursday night O.K.?' he suddenly asked.

'O.K. for what?' I asked.

'She's asked us all over to dinner'.

'I'm not going', Ria said.

'Nor am I', I said.

'Nor am I', he said.

We all laughed, and our common amusement at Lucy's expense made us anxious to continue the mood on Thursday night and we decided to accept the invitation.

'But are you sure she doesn't want to see you alone?' I went on. 'After all, we don't want to spoil things for you'.

'Yeah, you spoil things for me', he said.

Ria told me when we were alone, that Lucy had been after Aaron for years but that he didn't know how to get rid of her. They'd all been kids together, so there was a boy and girl-next-door atmosphere about their relation-

ship. What he'd arranged for Thursday night was obviously a cover-up for his own embarrassment. He was getting us there to shield him, and also to delay the dreaded hour when he'd have to see her alone. In fact when we drove down to her place on Thursday night, he suddenly invented that he had to go to Sweden the next day, probably for a month.

Lucy was staying in a small flat in Kilburn. It belonged to friends of hers and they'd gone away for a short holiday.

'Hi', she said to each one of us in turn as we shook her hand. I noticed the grip of her hand was much firmer than her voice.

She had natural blond hair, blue eyes and freckles. Her feet, like her hands, were just a shade too large for her, and her jaw and cheek-bones were a bit masculine. The tiny amount of lipstick she wore was the only touch of femininity about her. The two or three times I thought of Lucy afterwards always made me feel sad.

We sat down and had a drink of some kind and tried talking to one another.

'You got a 'phone here?' Aaron asked Lucy, looking at the telephone.

'Yeah, sure', Lucy said. 'Why, you called me up the other day'. She was a bit slow.

'Does it ring when someone dials the number? It must have been out of order when we left for Spain, or you must've been out one hell of a lot, 'cos I tried to ring you I don't know how many times'.

'Did you?' Lucy asked, smiling and disbelieving.

'Did I? Sure I did. I don't know how many goddam times I tried to call you up. Didn't I Ria? I told you. And I didn't have your address so I couldn't send you a wire or write to you even'.

'You . . . .' Ria was going to start on him, but he shouted her down.

'Yeah I did. Perhaps you don't remember. Your memory's none too hot, you know. Why, how often d'you let the milk



boil over?' he said, just about controlling his smile, but not for long.

'What's that?' he suddenly asked, picking up a completely inoffensive little statuette from the mantelpiece. It was a copy of a Degas ballet figurine with a tiny skirt round it. 'She wear knickers too?' he asked, holding the thing upside down. The reason he was behaving like an ass was because he had to find something that would give him an excuse to laugh aloud. He had a giggling fit and couldn't control it. So had Ria.

'What's the news from Bob?' he asked when his laughter had died.

'O, he's O.K. I guess. Haven't heard from him for about ten days. They're going down to California for a month. Guess they've gone. Nice and hot down there now, eh?'

'Yeah'.

'You expecting a call?' she suddenly asked.

'Me? Why no'.

'Cos you asked about the phone'.

'No'. He quickly made use of her stupidity. He said, 'I meant to ring up the lab about the film, but it's too late now. They'll have gone home. I'll call them up in the morning before I leave'.

'You going away again?' she asked, incredulous.

'Yeah, I've got to'.

'Where you going?'

'Sweden'.

'How long for, for god's sake?'

'Only about a month', he said. 'I've got to go on a job there. Camera work. It'll be good practise'.

'Yeah', she said

'How long are you staying in England?' I asked. She was beginning to be very sad.

'O, I don't really know. Suppose I can please myself. Don't much matter where I live'.

'You're lucky', Ria said.

'You think so?'

'You'll miss Bob's birthday if you're not back by the 29th', Aaron said.

'Yeah, I guess I will'.

There wasn't even a smell of food about the place. We were beginning to wonder what arrangement Aaron had made. Perhaps we'd been asked for after dinner.

'I'm hungry', Ria said to me, leaning over so that I could hear her semi-whisper.

'Me too', I said.

'You hungry?' Lucy asked us, smiling.

'They're always hungry', Aaron said. 'Don't you take no notice of them. Plenty of time for dinner'. Lucy got up.

'No, sit down. We can eat in an hour. I don't know why I brought these two along. All they're interested in is food. Jesus Christ can they eat. What's for dinner?'

'I'll go and get started', she said and went off to the kitchen.

'I wonder what the hell's for dinner', Aaron said when she had gone. He was sniffing audibly. 'Can't smell no bloody thing. Must be cold collations, I guess. Listen', he said, coming over to whisper. 'Ain't she beautiful? Jesus Christ, is she hot stuff. Fast as a turtle. A turdy turtle', he sniggered.

'Sit down and behave yourself. She's not as bad as you make out', Ria said. 'You do behave badly'.

'Yeah?'

'Listen', Ria told him. 'If you don't behave yourself, we'll make you go to Sweden. Else we'll tell her you're not going. How are you going to avoid her? She'll ring up'.

'Maybe I won't go to Sweden after all. Maybe I'll take me and Lucy to Cannes. How's that?'

'O.K. by me'.

'She'll be a great asset to you', I said to him. 'People will be jealous of you. She just oozes sex'.

'Yeah. Out of her freckles', he said.

Lucy came back about ten minutes later and said dinner

was ready. She apologised that it wasn't going to be good, because she couldn't cook very well. That was a very modest understatement.

We went in and I remember the table looking nicely laid with various glasses and plenty of cutlery set round each place, which roused my expectation of an interesting meal. There were some good rolls in a silver bread-basket. I remember the meal in every detail. I remember every object that was on that table.

We sat down in our respective places and Lucy went out to get the first course. In she came carrying a tray with four large white plates. When she put the edge of the tray down on the table to serve Ria, we all saw what it was. Rollmops. An ungarnished rollmops on a white plate looks very funny. The curled up fish with two wooden skewers through its middle really looks absolutely dead. It looks in fact, as if it's been killed three times over. It was also the one fish which Aaron absolutely detested. I remember staring at the fish in front of me, not daring to look up either at Ria or Aaron. I felt he was bobbing up and down trying to control his infectious laughter, and I ended up by tying up my shoelaces so that I could laugh under the table and out of sight. I was doing this when at the other leg of the table, I saw Aaron appear for exactly the same purpose. I immediately sat up to avoid his face. He stayed down there for what appeared to be half an hour. Ria, fortunately, had better control over herself. I decided to try and eat the damn fish, and to count and study every object on the table, so that my concentration on this problem could detract me from laughter. That's why I remember everything on that table so clearly. I was doing very well when suddenly Lucy said 'I hope you all like rollmops'.

I bent down immediately to play around with my other shoelace, and Aaron again followed me under the table. There was absolute chaos. I heard Lucy say that she had to go and look after the soup, and when she got up, I

came up again. The moment she had turned her back to us, Ria put her nibbled rollmops on Aaron's plate and when he came up again and saw this, he shrieked with laughter.

'Take the f . . . g fish back', he said to Ria and he put hers and his on her plate. He put his knife and fork down the moment Lucy came back with two plates of soup. When she went to fetch the others, I put the remains of my rollmops on his plate, as did Ria hers. It was then that he picked all three of them up in his hands and put them on top of the cupboard. We made ourselves so sick with laughter that we had miserable appetites for the rest of the meal. It was alright for Aaron. Lucy, obviously knowing his eating habits, didn't give him too much, and even most of that he managed to leave on his plate. But for Ria and me, our mean appreciation of Lucy's meal was a bad beginning to any kind of friendship.

One is often influenced by people, as by crowds, to do certain things, which, when one reflects on them later on, fill one with disgust and shame. In fact whilst one is doing them one foresees this feeling of disgust, but it does not stop one. Those few times I thought about Lucy afterwards, I always felt sad about her and disgusted by our behaviour that night. The table had looked nice, she'd gone to the baker to get some good rolls, and she had tried very hard and taken trouble to give us a good meal. She was easy prey for our amusement. Now that I know what was going on between Ria and Aaron at the time, I feel angry with myself for having been led to behave so badly. I surely was the most guilty of the three of us, because I was the only person to whom Lucy could have turned for some kind of protection. But I laughed at her just as much as the others. And I know she had noticed it too. She tried all the time to laugh with us, but we wouldn't and couldn't let her in on our game. She didn't know what was wrong with us, and I am sure she therefore assumed that we were laughing at her. Don't you think

the rollmops were high the next day and that their smell guided her to the top of the cupboard? Whether or not she uncovered our ungrateful behaviour, I shall never know. We saw Lucy again, two or three times after that, but every time she called Aaron made a point of being out. He simply refused to see her or speak to her after that evening.

'Jesus Christ, if I see that kid again, it'll spoil the whole memory of that goddam meal', he said to me. And that's the one thing I want to remember'.

I tried to find out through Ria whether he had ever been in any sense attached to Lucy. She didn't know. I think he must have made a mistake with her once or twice, given her a lead on or even a bit more. She wasn't the type to go after money, though Aaron suspected all women who even as much as looked at him, to 'smell the shekels' as he put it.

I am sure that the greatest ally of the deceiver is the person he is going to deceive. He or she is his unwitting ally, and a clever deceiver blocks suspicion in his ally by getting his implicit trust. The more he fosters this trust, the greater will become the deception, the more will this deception injure the hurt party. Would not Ria or I have suspected Aaron's behaviour towards Lucy had we thought our turn to be deceived by him might come one day? The thought never entered my head. Neither, I am sure, did Ria think of it. It is easy now to point to Aaron's pattern of behaviour when he deceived and to tell oneself: this is where you should have been suspicious of him; this is why it was quite obvious that your turn would come sooner or later. For now I think about it, he had done exactly the same to L. the first summer he had spent in our house four years ago. They had arranged to drive to Provence together that summer and Aaron had left it to L. to make all the arrangements. She had a number of friends in France whom they were to visit on the way. About a month before they were due to go, Aaron got

cold feet, and one night, in his most charming and malicious way, he told us: 'I ain't going to f . . . g France with her'. We were surprised because by now we'd heard all the detailed plans of the journey and we had entered, as it were, into the fever of his excitement which had now suddenly cooled off. 'I just been to her house and she showed me all the goddam knickknacks she's bought herself for the bloody journey. Jesus Christ, it makes a guy puke. It's all laid out there in her room, all the shit she's gotten together, laid out on her f . . . g bed. It's like a plan of battle, *ihr Kriegsplan, mit ihren verdammten Jagdkleider*. New shoes, stockings, knickers, a half dozen lousy dresses, all laid out on her bed. It's the bloody ammunition she wants to shoot me with. Why it made me sick looking at all the stuff. The thought of those pants being filled by her great big arse. . . .

'Have you told her you're not going?' Ria asked him.

'Not yet'.

'Perhaps you'll feel different in the morning. She's not that bad'.

'No she ain't. She's worse. Why, I bet the old bitch has even worked out the exact dates on which she's going to seduce me. But I ain't going. Ha ha, so it's botched her calculations, what?' he mocked.

L. died three years ago, and when Aaron heard the news he faintly smiled. I broke the news to him myself.

'You're kidding', he said, half credulous. 'Listen boy', he reprimanded me, 'That ain't the kind of joke that's funny'.

'I'm not joking. Klein's just rung up. She had a cerebral haemorrhage last night and died half an hour later'. For a moment, believing me now, he was stunned and silent. Then a charming boyish smile came over his face.

'So her hunting days are over', he said.

I think he was genuinely relieved at her death. She had hunted him for a while and he had survived her. What he never told me, and what I found out only later, was that

he'd been on intimate terms with L., and that he'd only got bored of her when he met Ria. Klein told me this only a short while ago, when we were discussing that summer. Klein has told me everything by now. There is no point in keeping anything back any longer. Besides, one remembers the dead by the details one knows of them. I want to know everything about the last four years. Everything.

## XVII

The resistance to believe what one doesn't want to believe can be so strong that one refuses to believe what one knows to be true. I should one day like to define the meaning of truth, but I know that I shall never be able to do so. I am no good at mathematics, at working out a problem reasonably and in stages, each stage bringing one nearer to the true answer. Over and over again, I ask myself even now; 'how can you have allowed this affair to go on right under your very nose?' 'I didn't know it was going on', I answer myself. 'But you knew it was going on. You already said so on Page 57 that Klein told you what was going on'. 'I know he did, but I didn't know what was going on'. Can you believe this? If not, I will make you believe it.

Two years ago in June, Ria and I took the children to a birthday-party of some friends. During tea, Aaron rang up. Ria went to the 'phone. I hate answering the telephone because I associate phone calls with bad news. Ria made as undramatic an exit as was possible and went straight home to Aaron. His father had died in America and he was flying home that night.

When I was a child, the hunchbacked father of a friend of the family died. When this friend came next to our house, my mother told me to go up to him and kiss him on the forehead. Since then, I have regarded such a kiss as a ritual of condolence and I greeted Aaron like this when I got back. I saw that his eyes were red and that he had been crying. His father was eighty-two and he had died in his sleep. He was a rich man. Aaron, who was named after his father and had 'junior' affixed to his name, was now plain Aaron Fawkes.

'I'll be back as soon as I can', he said to us as we drove



him to the airport. 'It's come at a right awkward time too, right in the middle of editing the film'.

'I'll do some work on it', Ria said, 'and I'll write to you what I've done and what new ideas I can think up for it'.

'Yeah . . . . Mother sounded quite calm'.

'Your brothers are there. And your sister. It's good to have the family near you when something like this happens', Ria said.

'Yeah'.

We had to wait a while and we ordered cups of coffee, but we only drank a few sips. When Aaron was finally called to board the plane, we said goodbye. I remember distinctly saying goodbye to him first as I felt quite genuinely that Ria was his more important friend, and that at a time like this he had to be given every consideration to relieve his distress. I also wanted to get over the business of touching him as quickly as possible.

It is as easy to hide one emotion behind another as it is to make yourself cry by holding an onion under your nose. When Ria embraced Aaron she had tears in her eyes, and her embrace seemed to loosen Aaron's hold on himself, for he too began to cry. Yet the look in his eyes was no longer a distant one, which pleased Ria when I told her later on. That is why I remember this farewell so clearly, not because I was particularly attentive at the time, but because I was made to recall it soon afterwards, in every detail, so that the reiteration at the time now sharpens the memory of it.

It was late that night when I went into our bedroom to go to bed. Ria was already in bed, sitting up with the light on, propped up against all our pillows. I had seen her many times like that before, her eyes red with crying and her face smudged with tears, which made marks on her cheek like water on a white tablecloth. During the first few years of our marriage, she had cried a good deal. She had then not yet got over the shock of Avram's death, and whenever she was reminded of it, she cried. I am sure

now that she used this tragedy at times for the pleasure of tears, and to focus all kinds of displeasure and unhappiness in her mind, which with a little effort she could have dispelled.

I did not ask her what was the matter, as I assumed that she was sad about Aaron's departure, and that that was the cause of her tears.

'Are you alright?' I asked, during one of the calmer interludes of her distress.

'Yes, I'm alright', she said.

I admire the quality of distress which is contained. Sharing sadness with someone else is always cheap and smacks of sentimentality. I had turned off the main light and was walking over to get into bed when she said, 'I love Aaron. I can't be without him'.

'I know', I said, stroking the back of her trembling head. In an emergency one forgets the finer points of action or speech. When Ria cried, she was always in utter distress. My first aim, therefore, was to calm her. Besides, her weeping had always, yes always, a strange effect on me. It made me feel as if I were there to receive her confession, as if she was crying especially for me, and that if I turned my back on her when she was in this state, she would be completely and utterly alone. 'I have a cruel streak in me, but I also have a streak of pride. Never, therefore, did I abandon her, although in the end she must have distrusted my loyalty. But then she was confused; she did not hold on long enough. Perhaps one more second, one more thought and she would not have taken those wretched pills. But she was not herself any longer. That's why she took those pills.

'I'm sorry', she said to me, 'but I just can't help it. I love him. I want to go to America. I can't live without him'.

When she said, 'I can't help it', I believed her unquestionably. Not only did I believe her, but I loved her for it. Why do we want to be honest if we cannot face honesty in all its appearances, even when it smarts our

pride and peace like the lashes of a whip on raw skin? And not only face it either, but admire it for its sheer beauty and finality? I can see you put out your tongue at me, call me a nit-wit, an impotent weak husband, who should have given his wife a good thrashing and told her to get out a long time ago. I pity you fools. You live in tiny cages, the size of your minds which do not even allow you to look at freedom through the grills of ignorance.

'He will come back very soon', I said to her, 'and he will write, he will write often'.

I forget what else I said to her, but I succeeded in calming her. I remember we were very close that night, and for some time during Aaron's absence we were very happy.

I said just now that Ria was no longer herself when she killed herself. Quite so. That part of her reasoning which should have helped her to hold on for a few more seconds during which she could have perhaps saved herself, went berserk. I consider her to have been a heroine. Perhaps you consider her to have been a fool. One or two of the people who have come to our house during the last ten days to express their sympathy, have said how foolish Ria was to have taken her life, and that she can't have meant it, that she mistook the pills for something else (for what?) and that she must have become drowsy, so that she took one pill after another, having forgotten that she had already taken the first one. How little we know about one another. We don't even know enough about each other to prevent us from expressing an insult instead of sympathy.

You will say to me; how can you still maintain that you did not know what was going on when at the very same time you tell us. you describe to us exactly, how even your wife told you, confessed to you, made it unmistakably clear to you that she had deceived you? It's as well that I make myself entirely clear on this point.

I remember sitting with my father in the drawing room

about twenty-five years ago. I was between six and ten years old. We had a new wireless and it was turned on. He was listening to a Beethoven quartet, the C sharp minor opus 131, which I have since heard many times. When it came to the slow movement, my father suddenly raised his head and began to conduct with his right hand. His other hand was lying on the fat arm of the dark green, velvet-covered sofa. After a few moments, he made a movement with his lips as if he were kissing the music, moving his lips and keeping his lips together. When there was a repeat in the music, my father said to me, 'This is the most wonderful music ever written. When I die, I want this played at my funeral'. He then went on with his conducting until the end of the movement, humming the theme all the time, and when the finale came, he held his hand poised in its last position, looked at me, and almost imperceptibly nodded with his head. 'You don't understand this yet, but one day you will', he said. Three years ago, on a visit to the Kursaal in Wiesbaden, I heard a performance, a quite mediocre performance, of this very quartet. Suddenly my eyes were filled with tears, and I remembered my father's remark to me, and his expression of hope that one day I would understand this music. It expresses a way a man could speak to God. Until tears come to your eyes, you are not sad. Until anger makes you clench your fists and spit your words, you are not angry. Until you are reviled, you have not been deceived.

## XVIII

At the end of July that year, Klein and I went on a journey through Germany and Austria. It was a journey which ultimately assumed the form of a strange pilgrimage. It was unplanned and unintentional, yet at the end of it we both felt we had covered an inevitable route.

Some friends of his, with whom he had been staying in Strasbourg where I picked him up, had taken Klein one afternoon to tea somewhere near the Champ du Feu in the Vosges. On the way back they had driven past the Natzweiler concentration camp which the French have kept intact with sufficiently lurid details to strike chords of intense horror in even the most callous visitor. We drove there the next day so that I too could see this place. You pay a few francs to go and a French guide takes you on a tour of inspection. But before you start going round, they lock the gates behind you, and for the first time, in spite of all the knowledge you might possess of the crimes of Germany, in spite of the complete accuracy of your imagination which for years has shown you what now you see before your eyes, for the first time, you are in a concentration camp. As survivors of European Jewry, it was a most strange sensation for us to start our journey at the end of twenty-seven thousand lives, which lay reduced to kilograms of ashes in the crematorium of Natzweiler.

From there, we drove on to Cologne where I was born and where Klein had attended the University the year of my birth. We showed each other the places where we had lived, and reconstructed the city destroyed by war with the details of our memories. Our journey took us ultimately to Vienna where Klein had lived before the war. From there, we drove several times through the Burgenland to the frontiers of Hungary. In fact we journeyed

through the part of Europe which Hitler had dreamt of as Grossdeutschland, and the feeling of survival we experienced on our way caused a bond between us which can only arise from a heritage of common experience.

In the beginning, as I have said, I was jealous of Aaron's friendship with Klein. How long this lasted I cannot remember because I cannot now recall when first I became confident of Klein's friendship. I know it existed long before our journey, probably since the very time he had praised my work. But after we came back, Aaron, who arrived back from America a week or so later, felt there was no more rivalry between us for Klein's friendship and he looked upon this as some kind of rotten defeat.

It is no idle or convenient surmise on my part when I say that Aaron now felt jealous of my friendship with Klein. Ria herself told me several times, not that Aaron had complained to her, but that Klein was no longer interested in Aaron since I had, as it were, replaced him. I know this wasn't true. I had gone with Klein several times to the Post Office in Salzburg where a *poste restante* letter was supposed to be waiting for him from Aaron, and I distinctly remember Klein's bitter disappointment when there wasn't one there. The truth is that Aaron used my closer friendship with Klein as an excuse to drift away from his old friend, and that Ria encouraged this. Where intrigue begins, truth takes a holiday.

It all falls nicely into place now. We are beginning to set plans for a battle, and whether we are involved as defenders or aggressors doesn't matter at all. What counts is, that at the end of it, we have all been involved.

When Aaron came back from America, he announced that his mother and his 'kid' brother were coming to England on an extended visit.

'Yeah', he said, 'the old girl's coming over to visit her Debrett cronies, and Jack's coming over because he can't stand being married to my mother. He's going to stay on when she goes back'.

'Then why didn't you stay behind?' Ria asked quite seriously. She could well afford the remark now that he was back in England, but what prompted her above all to make it was an intense distaste of callousness.

'Gee, you think I could stand being her "husband?" Now she ain't gotten my father no more to schlepp around her lousy tea parties and cocktails, she takes one of us. She lay low the first month after the funeral, but then she started up again'.

'Klein told me she's very nice', I said.

'Sure she's nice. She's fine. Only I don't like the people she mixes with. They're all rich as shit. They stink with dough. You mention Raphael to them and they ask, "Raphael? How d'you cook that?"'

'What about Jack? What's he going to do here?' I asked.

'Same as he does at home. Sweet fanny adams, unless he paints. He's never seen Europe, so I'll show him around a bit. He's all depressed at home, and mother just thwarts him. She don't mean to, but she does. Do Jack good to get a breather'.

When they arrived, Jack moved into a room Aaron had found near us, and Mrs. Fawkes moved into one of those hotels which London so admirably provides, in the area of St. James's, for home-bred and foreign dowagers. During the first three weeks of their visit, Aaron brought Jack to the house once or twice. Jack had a quiet subdued voice and manner, and he was polite and considerate to the point of boredom. But we did not, for some time, see 'Queen Victoria', as we had nicknamed Mrs. Fawkes.

One day, I asked Aaron whether his mother had gone into hiding.

'Why?' he asked.

'I'm curious about her. I'd like to meet her'.

'You will. 'S matter of fact, she's asked me to make a date. She wants us all to have dinner one day this week'.

'Why doesn't she come along to the house?'

'Cos you ain't asked her'.

He was quite right. We hadn't asked her, on the other hand Aaron could have easily asked us to fix a dinner party. We arranged one for Saturday night.

'Thanks', he said, 'she'd love to come'. He gave me that stunned expression of gratitude, his eyes blinking and his nostrils dilating a little. He covered his lower lip with his top lip, and stood before me as if under some great strain, unable to speak another word.

Aaron had stayed with us now for a number of years, and owing to his natural eclectic tendencies, we had quite inevitably exerted a considerable influence over him. I quite understood, therefore, his initial reluctance to introduce his mother to us. At least, that is how I saw it at the time. And in order to attain the clarity about deception which I am striving for, I must not jump the sequence of events for the sake of convenience. In the same way as I used to try to prevent my parents coming to school on Speech days, because of the untold embarrassment this would cause me in case they spoke to certain masters etc., Aaron at first tried to prevent our meeting Victoria.

'You know, by the way', he said to me the Friday before she came, 'my mother don't call me Aaron. Oh no, that lousy name ain't good enough for her'.

'She calls him Bunty', Ria shouted from across the room. 'Bunty's a girl's name, isn't it. You once knew a Bunty, didn't you?' she asked me.

'Cut it out', he shouted back at her.

'What else do you want to tell us about your mother?' I asked. We were all laughing.

'When she wants to fill her fountain-pen, she cuts an artery. She's got blue blood', Ria said.

'Listen, you don't want her to come? O.K. we'll go some place else. Plenty of food in London. And you can stay home and wash handkerchiefs'.

'Now then', she said, 'none of your lip, and no sulking'.

We had also invited Klein, a distant female cousin of Aaron's, and her husband. They all arrived in good time,



except Aaron, who had first gone to fetch Jack and then his mother. About three quarters of an hour after she was ready, Victoria had rung up to find out whether 'Mr. Fawkes' had left to pick her up. At the post-mortem of the party, to explain his lateness, he said his mother hadn't been ready. When told about the 'phone call, he insisted that she'd never rung up, that he'd been in her room all the time, telling her for Chrissake to hurry up.

Victoria, we knew, was 74 years old. But she looked really quite remarkably young for her age, at most sixty. She was tall, white-haired and exceedingly well groomed. 'Ria, my dear. How wonderful to meet you. Bunty's told me such a lot about you', she said, coming into the house where Ria stood to greet her. She presented her with some flowers, and then said much the same to me.

'What a wonderful house you have. How wonderful'.

Perhaps the number of syllables in this absurd and untrue eulogism coincided with the number of steps it took her to walk from where she had taken her coat off to the lounge. 'And what a gorgeous drawing-room. Klein', she said going up to him. 'How are you? You look wonderful. What do you hear of E's parents? I had only a card from them last Christmas'.

She had hardly any trace of an American accent, which apparently was as much a sign of excellent New England breeding as is a dachshund's sheen of fur and crooked legs. She somehow reminded me of one of our London publishers whom I have met, a rather fat podgy man, who wears a signet ring as if it were an heirloom, although if you look really hard enough you feel that you can still see the pricetab on it. He eats in secret, but diets in public, ostensibly so rumour has it, to save money when he takes people out to dine. They get embarrassed by his meagre fare and order little. His behaviour is quite impeccable and he listens most attentively to everything you say. Only when you leave does he cut in, so that he manages to be the first to say goodbye.

We went into dinner. We have a long refectory table, and Ria used to sit at one end and I at the other. That night, the only time this ever happened, Ria sat at my end of the table and I at hers. Perhaps I remember this now because at present, and for how much longer I do not know, I will not allow anyone to use that chair or the chair in the lounge where she used to sit and read. (Nor will I allow anyone to touch her clothes. I have the key to her cupboard in my pocket. When I walk about, it rattles against the empty bottle of pills). That night, we sat like that, and it did not strike me as particularly strange. Victoria was on my right, next to her was Klein, and Jack was on my left. Ria had Aaron on her right; the others were distributed round the rest of the table.

What amused me at first was the complete lack of any kind of resemblance whatsoever between Mrs. Fawkes and her two sons. There was not one feature, not one physical movement by which one could have even attempted to connect the two generations. Perhaps Victoria was aware of this, for the first thing she said to me at table was, 'Has Bunty talked to you about his father?'

'Yes', I lied, 'he's often talked to me about him'.

I didn't know whether to express my condolences there and then for her recent bereavement, for not having known her before we hadn't written, but I didn't in case it would have embarrassed her.

'Has he told you about the time my husband got the K.B.E. from the King?'

'Now then, mother', Aaron called across the table, 'none of that crap. It's all right. They know all about it. Dad never used it, so don't you use it neither'.

'Bunty, you're awful. He really is naughty', she said to me, smiling

'He got it for assisting in drawing up the Marshall Plan during the War. He loved England. Always had his clothes made here. And his shoes. Bunty, we must go and see the tailor to-morrow. I must tell him about father'.

'Yeah, O.K. Perhaps you'll stand me a suit the same time'.

Meanwhile she had helped herself to half an egg and a blob of mayonnaise.

'Why, this is the best mayonnaise I've ever tasted, Ria. Absolutely wonderful. Marvellous. And what wonderful rolls', she said to me, breaking off a piece and dividing it again several times before putting it back on her side plate and picking up a crumb.

Jack was eating slowly and quietly, said the food was very good and helped me pour out some wine. When I sat down again, Victoria had already finished. That is, her knife and fork were lying in their final position, and she was no longer occupied with the hors-d'œuvre. One tiny cut was missing off the egg, and the blob of mayonnaise had a slight dent in it.

I said, 'I'm sorry you don't like. . . .'

'But I love it', she cut in. 'I've had heaps'.

Here, of course, was the first family resemblance between Aaron and his mother. For some reason, obviously because I had associated Aaron's nibbling with his bad teeth, I now tried to discover whether Victoria had false teeth. I listened most carefully to her s's. If people pronounce this wet consonant with the slightest imprecision, they either have gaps in their front teeth, or false ones. I felt like the fox making the blackbird sing to drop the cheese from its beak. Her s's were perfect, absolutely impeccable.

'Klein', she said, turning towards him, so that I could see the wrinkles on her aging neck, '*erzahl' mir über Oestreich. Ist Wien noch so schön wie vor dem Krieg? Und sind die Leute noch so sympathisch? Und Salzburg, Buntz's favourite town. Do you know the hotel where he always stays, the Goldene Hirsch? Ach, wie schön, da sieht man den Mozart spazieren gehn!*'

Klein answered her in English, in staccato fashion. What can one answer to questions which require not an answer but ears to listen to? In any case, Klein was, as

I now recognize clearly recalling his behaviour that night, in a most awkward position. He knew everything that had gone on and was going on between Aaron and Ria. Only two days ago he told me that Ria had come to him a few days after we had got back from Austria and a few days before Aaron had returned from America, to tell him that she now thought of leaving me. She told him that she could not bear to be separated from Aaron and that although she loved me more than him, she simply could not control her passion. In fact, she had gone to Klein to ask for advice, and he had sent her away after calming her and having told her to contemplate the matter for at least a few more months. You might say now that if she had gone away with Aaron, the tragedy of her death might have been averted. But whilst this thought is passing through your mind, ask yourself whether Aaron would have gone away with her.

Nothing except brutality can be achieved in cold blood, and, as I've said before, I think that the schemer is a brutal person. This sentence comes back to me now as I think of that evening we entertained Victoria to dinner, because for some reason I now look upon that evening as the beginning of diabolical torture which was inflicted on us during the many months to follow. I cannot help associating Victoria with the iron maiden who stands in the torture chamber of Nuremburg castle. The rather plain outside of this maiden is deceptive for when she is opened, you can see on the inside the spikes which penetrated the bodies of the prisoners who were thrust inside her.

I only saw Victoria once after she had been to our house, the next week, when she took us out to dinner to reciprocate our hospitality. She wrote several letters to Ria. She has a very large, legible handwriting and does not use many words to cover a page of notepaper. Two of them I have now found in a drawer of Ria's dressing table. They are full of praise for her and gratitude for what she

had done for her son. 'I shall never be able to repay you for the kindness you have shown Bunty. Of all the people who tried to make him go to the dentist (how his dear father pleaded with him) you are the one who succeeded. What a difference it will make for him, what heartbreak his stubbornness has caused, and now, thanks to you my dear, all is well'. At the beginning of October, that year, he had his teeth done.

## XIX

He came down one morning with his face distorted beyond recognition. His appearance so early in the morning was, in any case, most unusual – it was before nine – but I had literally to look at his clothes and other points of recognition before I could believe that it was Aaron who stood before me. Ria shrieked when he came into the room, but a moment later, we both laughed.

‘Dorian Gray’, I said. ‘I’ve never seen anything like it. You’ve got a boil on your gums’.

He tried to smile as well, but the more he tried the more painful his expression became, and the funnier his swollen face. He looked as wounded and heavy as an injured seal. That same day, Ria took him to our dentist who extracted every tooth in Aaron’s mouth. Had he not submitted to this gruelling operation, he would have died. His teeth had been rotting for over twenty years, and the poison was fast beginning to enter his system. For ten days he was in bed and Ria looked after him day and night.

Whenever anybody in our house was ill, she would look after them with enormous energy and calm, keeping vigil over her patient all the time. Her efficiency during these times was quite incredible, the more so as ordinarily she was useless about the house.

By now, you must have accused me many times of confusion, gross confusion. ‘You bring in certain events’, you say, ‘and then suddenly, as if bored by them, instead of planting them firmly into your story, you leave the holes dug up and the plants lying next to them, where they will dessicate and rot. Similarly, you say, ‘you introduce certain characters, occupy yourself with them for a paragraph or two, and then leave them stranded in a verbal desert

where they will perish without anyone caring one jot about them'.

Nine days ago, we drove out four miles to bury Ria. I wanted no-one there except Klein, and as, in my religion, we need ten men to bury our dead, eight strangers. People, even people whom I respect, paid no attention to my request. Someone, I don't know who it was, had rung them and told them the time and place of the funeral. The children have gone to some friends, where they will stay for a few more days. Only Mariella, our maid, is in the house with me. She asks me every few hours what I want to eat, but I'm not hungry for anything I can think of, and therefore I don't care what she cooks. When she calls me, I go down and eat whatever she has prepared. Life goes on. I don't yet know how to tell the children.

Apropos my confusion, I have asked myself these last ten days, over and over again, before and after I started to put our story down on paper: 'What did I have to do with the muscles in Ria's arms, with her liver, with the nerves in her toes? What remains to me of her now she is dead?' The flesh falls away and the bones crumble. There are tribes who believe that the dead inhabit the air and space, that they float above the firmament, naked and invisible. For me, there remains only the frustration of everything that I had desired from Ria, a cheated past and a lost future. Why did she do it? At a moment like this I cannot believe it and feel sure she will walk in at any moment. At other times, I curse her; I swear aloud at her, as I sometimes used to when she was alive, especially towards the end when she was broken. I cannot bear defeat. I go berserk with rage when someone close to me has been cheated, not with the person who's done the cheating but with the one who has been cheated. Can she have known this dreadful trait in me so well that she killed herself to impress me with her heroism and to prove her love for me with her life? If I can really prove

this to myself, I shall kill Fawkes. But there is much I have to explain to myself before I can prove this.

Do you see that I do not have to excuse my confusion? I am writing this down only because of it, and therefore, why should it not be reflected in what I write? But I can see the blindness before my eyes rising like the early mist over a lake which presages clear visibility that day. Soon, I feel, I will be able to see all the details I have missed these last four years.

It took Aaron over three months to get used to his new teeth during which time he literally went into hiding from everybody except ourselves and Jack. Klein inquired after him every time he came to our house, but Aaron would not come down to greet him, and so it was with all our friends. From the first time he walked into the house with his hand over his mouth, after coming from the dentist who had fitted his dentures, to the time, three months later, when he began once more to walk about freely, no-one mentioned his teeth in his presence, not even the children. Ria had put down his embarrassment to his dread of growing old. He was at the end of his 'thirties and his black hair was turning grey. He used to comb it very carefully, allowing the filthy comb, which he always had in his pocket, barely to touch his hair until it could race freely through it. Before this could happen, he would invariably spend about three minutes placing tiny strands of hair into position with his fingers. He had a horror of losing his hair, and took the utmost care never to tear so much as one with his comb.

Nearer Christmas and over the holidays, many of our friends give parties. That Christmas we went everywhere without Aaron who spent his time patiently at home, planning a new film, ordering new equipment and studying his past experiments. He spent hours looking at an endless footage of film through his moviola. After eighteen months of editing, the film of the Holy Week was still not finished. It was never to be completed. I think we threw



it away with all the rubbish we cleared out of our cellar the other day.

During these three months of voluntary exile, he developed a most peculiar attitude towards our friends. I say 'our friends', because he never regarded them as his own, though some of them had become so. But he had a notion in his head, some notion, no doubt, of honour, that those people to whom we had introduced him 'belonged', first and foremost, to us, and tolerated him only because of us. This masochistic streak in him now developed to a frightening degree.

'You had a good time last night, eh?' he used to ask us the day after we'd been out somewhere.

'Not bad. So and so was there. Good grub. They all asked after you'.

'Yeah. Sure they did'.

'They did', we insisted.

'Yeah, I'm sure'.

'No, they all said, 'thank god you've come without that American bore you always schlepp around', Ria said.

He usually smiled at Ria's sarcasm, but never enough to show that he took her remarks in that mood entirely as a joke. He always appeared to feel stung by her, and however bravely he tried, the sting itched and he scratched it.

At that time I remember distinctly his feeling of depression at being unwanted, and the fact that he had neither cause nor right for this feeling made his apparent wretchedness even more pathetic. Both Ria and I did whatever we could to alleviate his childlike fear. Several times we refused invitations in order to keep him company, although we never told him we had done so. On innumerable occasions we tried to make him come out, to visit new places with him, to make him go about alone, or just to drive into town to walk around for half an hour amongst the crowds. But he would not budge from his insistence to stay in the house. Our house, in fact became like a prison to us, and since we lived there and had

access to it as well as freedom, he somehow made us feel like his jailers. What is more, I am sure that he wished to instil this feeling in us on purpose, and that his desire to do so helped him to endure this absurd siege.

He asked Jack to buy his Christmas presents for us that year. They were fairly expensive, sufficiently expensive in fact to cause us embarrassment. He bought the children charming pullovers and other articles of clothing which in some way he had really no right to buy for them. There are articles of clothing which only the closest members of one's family may buy for one. I was shocked when I saw he'd bought shoes for the children. For us, there was Swedish pottery, a heavy Morano-glass vase and a dozen fine brandy balloons. Ria and I tried to analyse this sudden outburst of generosity, but only now do I realise how far off the mark we both were in our guesses. I put it down stupidly and simply to a show of money.

'This is his first opportunity to let his inheritance speak a little', I said to her.

'Do you think he got anything?' Ria asked me. 'I thought he sold it all when E. was ill'.

'Yes. He sold some shares his grandfather had left him. It sounds better if you just say, "I sold my inheritance". That's a story he's spread to impress people. Klein told me. Not of course that it could have helped E'.

'He's a bastard', Ria said. She was astonished anew every time she discovered a further aspect of his lies and meanness. 'Do you know why I think he bought out Liberty's?'

'Well?'

'Because he had to ask Jack to do his shopping, and he didn't want to expose his meanness to his brother', she said.

'In that case, and you're probably right, he'll give Jack hell'.

'You bet he will. He will, he'll start charging him for every ride in his car, or he'll make Jack pay for his meals

and coffees for the next three months. You watch next time we go out. It'll either be you or Jack who'll pay'.

Ria's prediction was not entirely correct, but what was true was that he had become much meaner since his father's death. Ria could not stand meanness, and over the years she had given me many lessons in generosity which at times she practised even to the point of recklessness. I have found that people who do not possess the traits of meanness never complain about meanness in other people. In fact I suspect people who complain of other people's meanness, for if they were not guilty themselves they would simply laugh at and tease the subjects of their complaints.

'You know', Aaron told me one day, a few months after Jack had arrived, 'Jack ain't paid for one cup of coffee since he's been over here. Why, I've got to twist his f . . . g arm to make him pay the rent the end of the week. "Lend it to me", he says to me. Twice he's asked me to lend it to him. "I ain't got no money on me". Ain't got no money on him, my arse. He's loaded. He just don't want to part with them lovely green backs. He's costing me a frigging fortune'.

What he did to our friends when he re-emerged from his 'dental hibernation' was quite astonishing. A number of them, he simply cut dead. He wouldn't even acknowledge them in the street, he walked right past them, leaving the protesting individual stranded amidst his gesticulations of greeting. Once, I actually saw this happen and it looked very funny. From others whom he could not thus avoid with his new found trick of apparent invisibility, he accepted dinner invitations and simply didn't turn up. Only very few were spared these ruthless and unwarranted snubs, and even with those, his behaviour deteriorated to a degree which for several months made one doubt his sanity. The pattern of behaviour on these occasions was always the same. He used to arrive late, ask for a large drink of hard liquor, from which he would never take

more than a sip or two. He was very quiet, almost subdued in his talk, until someone made some entirely inoffensive remark which he would suddenly pounce on.

'What d'you mean by that?' he once asked another dinner guest at some friends' of ours. The girl had been teased about some boy-friend of hers and she was describing in an amusing way the great advantage of marrying someone with money.

'By what?' she asked Aaron.

'By what you just said'.

The girl didn't know which part of her slight argument Aaron wished to evaluate. She therefore tried to ignore his request which Aaron took as a snub. He interrupted her the moment she tried to carry on with what she'd been saying.

'You said you'd marry any guy with money, and that love ain't as important for marriage as it's made out to be'.

'I didn't say quite that'.

'You said other things too, but you said that as well'.

In fact the wretched girl had qualified her remark. Above all she had no desire to be taken seriously.

'You'd live with some great big fat slob who was loaded, could provide for you and your kids. How about having them kids? You thought about that? You German?'

'No'.

'Cos the idea is eminently Fascist. You'd have been sent to one of those stud farms, provided your blood was pure Ayrvan'.

'What on earth . . . .' I started asking him.

'What on earth, yeah, what on earth you talking about?' he shouted at me across the table, mimicking me. 'Ask her. What's the difference between being indifferent to the man you marry or the man you go to bed with to have kids? If security's all you want, what the hell?'

This ridiculous argument went on for the entire evening. In an obsessional manner, he shouted and got excited

at every new rubbishy idea he introduced into his arguments. The more one tried to interfere to silence him, the more agitated he became, the more violent became his talk. After a time, everyone realised that Aaron's behaviour was hardly normal, that he was obviously under some terrible stress and both out of pity and astonishment they sat there in silence to listen to his ranting. Even Ria was helpless and unable to shut him up in these states. I remember her trying very bravely at times to enter the argument on his side, in order to pull out as soon as possible, dragging him with her. But it never worked. He held on with the stubbornness of a maniac until, quite as suddenly as he had started, many dreadful hours later, he reverted to normal.

A month ago, at most five weeks, when Ria was beginning to break down, she told me that Victoria had known everything about her and Aaron. Apparently she had met Victoria soon after she had arrived, for tea one afternoon, at her hotel. The idea of not telling me of this meeting had been Mrs. Fawkes', because she did not want me to suspect that she knew about the affair, which would have made her meeting me quite impossible. I now feel outraged by this clandestine meeting, because Ria was being cheated, deceived and tempted to accede to a promise she never suspected to be asked to fulfill. 'Promise me', Victoria had asked her, 'promise me, my dear, never to stand in Aaron's way if ever he wants to marry'. It is not that Ria was made to promise something which later on made her unable to break her word. She did not live by social and arbitrary codes of honour. What outrages me is that Aaron marshalled his mother into his affair with Ria not because he wanted her to accept Ria, but because he wanted her to help him extricate himself from a union which was becoming so strong that he did not dare to take the next step. The next step was to go away with her and to live his life with her. Else he should have left Ria. It was not even too late for that. What it was too late

for, was to climb on to the very height of their relationship to leave her there, stranded and alone.

Cowardice is a deception of strength. When strength runs dry in cowards, panic takes over, and with it, all resistance breaks, as panic has to feed itself on what it can destroy.

## XX

Between conceit and achievement lies a no-mans-land, a frightening wilderness of the mind. You must expect shots from the frontiers, arrest without a charge. The chance to move on to the next country, or retreat to the one whence you came, exists, but you'll need all the luck in the world to make it. Suspicion rages from both sides, the frontier-guards have their binoculars trained on you and watch every move you make. One false step and the guards will shoot you down and destroy you, at the least, they will laugh at you, they will roar their laughter at you and humiliate you so that you daresn't proceed or retreat. You are condemned to the wilderness.

Aaron had been in a strange state of mind throughout the winter. It was a mood that I sensed at the time to be directly inspired by his new teeth, but until the Spring, this mood was dark, unpredictable, fermenting like new wine which slowly clarifies to reveal its character. The moment he started working on his new film, his mood became revealed.

The subject for it was the London street-musicians and buskers. Throughout this long winter, with all the pain and suffering of creation, he had conceived the idea of putting a part of the West End street scene onto celluloid. To shoot a film of these performers was fairly cheap. No actors were required, the crowds were unpaid extras and the sound could be picked up by a portable recording machine. El Greco like beggars, Chaplinesque clowns and singers, some of whose voices make one dream for a moment of stifled splendour, were the main characters of this drama of the streets, which was enhanced by the fact that the law forbids these characters to perform. They play a constant and daring game of hide-and-seek with

the police, but they carry on undaunted by the danger of arrest or of being fined, to earn their untaxable living. They don't work set hours; they fear no boss; they can quit at any time.

Aaron and Ria started to go into town every afternoon. He lugged his big camera and tripod around, and Ria took down the sound. They started to work in routine with the buskers, moving from pitch to pitch, frequenting the cafés and alley-ways which the buskers used, taking notes on their habits and ideas which were to help them later on with the editing of the film. Now and again I went with them to watch them at work, and once or twice, I even lent a hand at something.

Watching Aaron at work, he revealed a new and remarkable confidence. There was a sudden boldness in him which eventually was to carry him along the road to fame. He was quite obviously gathering a startling momentum of confidence and now, on reflection, it was quite clear and inevitable that his work would sooner or later be recognised, and that his name would be made famous by the most powerful medium by which one can do this sort of thing – television.

When I say that Aaron was becoming bold, I don't wish to refer only to his ideas, though they too were really quite extraordinary. I have, unfortunately, forgotten many of them, but I remember that often Aaron talked at that time about the 'anarchy of the artist' to which clever phrase he related all his artistic intentions. But the boldness that impressed me most, was his deft and firm handling of Ria with the recording-machine, and his handling of the buskers. He made them repeat over and over again certain parts of their act until he had shot it right. And his handling of the crowd was quite superb. Once, I actually saw him move a large crowd of spectators, perhaps two hundred people, from one side of Leicester Square to the other. 'The light ain't right this side', he had shouted to them. 'D'you mind moving to the other side?'



'Did you see them slobs move?' he asked me afterwards. 'Like bloody sheep, they moved. Jesus Christ, are people stupid! I tell you a camera gives you as much power as a gun. Make a whole crowd move just like that', he said, snapping his fingers, 'Fabulous'.

There are times in one's life when one wants to overtake people, or at least to come even with them. When I left school, I resolved not to meet certain masters again until I had achieved some success in life. I felt that to face them before then would make me experience once more the humiliation they instilled in me, quite innocently I suppose, with their superior knowledge. I think that winter Aaron had reached the stage in his life when he wanted to overtake people, and this was the reason for his increasing social rudeness. This, as well as his new teeth, were part of the impetus for his new-found boldness. He was throwing himself into his work. At times he even broke the old routine of not getting up before noon, and he made out that he didn't care a damn any longer for anybody's opinion of him. Also he developed a new manner of greeting people. Whereas before he had always greeted them with effluent enthusiasm which had put them at ease straight away, he now played the shy and modest man. This change of habit was particularly nauseating when he applied it to people he had known previously. He dropped his eyelids for slightly longer than was necessary to express the sensation of a handshake, dropped his head a little and took a tiny step backwards. Then he just looked at the person and waited for them to speak first. This little trick of behaviour created an air of mystery about Aaron, and it immediately befuddled those who were with him, putting them at a disadvantage from the start. It worked that way with most people. I watched it. On his conscience of course, weighed the fact that he had, at the age of thirty-nine, as yet achieved nothing. Sure now of rectifying this little gap, and trying to impart that he had deliberately waited until now, until the time was

right, he tried to put forward his achievement by already assuming the manner of success. If a man shows false modesty, there is always a flaw in the reason for his behaviour. On the other hand, I thought there was something really heroic in his behaviour. He was taking on himself the responsibility of prejudging his gifts and what they would achieve for him. I think this risk of responsibility also gave him added impetus for his work. During that time, he decried the achievements of others with great facility and venom, and the more he did this, and the more formidable the subjects of his decial became, the greater became one's expectations of his forthcoming work.

I think that the only people he made an effort with at that time were the buskers themselves. He developed a most touching and sensitive understanding of them. He called them by their christian names or their nicknames; he very quickly started using their jargon and they told him how much they made each week. Both Aaron and the buskers expected fame and money from the film, but of more immediate interest, though closely related to this, was the crowd and its importance to both sides. For Aaron, the crowd was gratifying, because he could masquerade before them, in public, as a fully-fledged filmmaker without having to show one foot of film as proof of his skill. For the buskers, the camera brought additional people into the crowd, so that Aaron's work with them somewhat increased their takings and also satisfied their genuine desire for a large audience to view their performances.

I remember we had endless discussions about how the film ought to be shot. Both Ria and I put forward suggestions, some good, some bad, but Aaron rejected them all on some indefinable pretext. 'I don't want no preconceived notions in my head', he once said to me. 'You've got to be free with your camera, you've got to be goddam passive with it, simply adjust focuses and pull the release, just shoot the mood of your subject. That's what I'm after.

I don't want no ideas. Ideas scare the shit out of you. They make you blind to what you're supposed to see'.

How much of this philosophy about his work was careful thought, and how much of it was an expression of spontaneous sloth and laziness, I could not tell at the time. It is easy now. The ends make the means discernable. We were after all, two of the main people to whom he wanted to prove himself. That's why his pride would not allow him to accept any of our ideas. His achievement had to be singlehanded. Besides he wanted to be independent of Ria's power over him; he wanted to be free of her and at the same time, he was still using her. That was the reason for his bold behaviour towards Ria at times, which I had mistaken for a moment of new-found confidence.

By now, inevitably, I knew a great deal of what was going on under my very nose. Klein had told me many things and Ria herself had revealed to me her feelings of disgust with Aaron on several occasions when she had been no longer able to contain herself. Not that this made any significant difference to my blindness. As long even as one does not actually see anything with one's own eyes, one can still afford the luxury of blindness.

Besides, instincts other than those which drive you towards vision, involve you in living. I like to protect people. It is a cheap way of gaining praise and it satisfies to some extent my desire for power. When Ria was attacked, I always defended her. I defended her for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted to indulge my desire for protection, and secondly, anyone who really attacked her, was assuming a privilege that disturbed both my pride and my feeling of intimacy with her. Whenever, therefore, her relationship with Aaron was threatened, I tried to save it and make it succeed because I wanted to protect her. When my pride and my feeling of intimacy with her was attacked and I actually saw what was happening, I counter-attacked ruthlessly, at times, even with violence.

One night during that Spring, Ria and I had a terrible argument. I remember that our maid was out for the evening; Aaron was over at Jack's place and the children were asleep. For a long time, Ria and I had found it difficult to be alone together. I suppose we both felt that we owed one another an explanation, but neither of us was willing to give it. Not yet, anyhow. We were out, if you like, on separate voyages, and the time had not yet come to return to harbour. She looked extremely slovenly that night, with her hair unkempt, her nails dirty and her clothes marked with stains, buttons missing and her skirt held up by a safety pin. She often went about dressed in a pathetic manner, which was one of her ways of expressing contempt for any kind of social conformity. The fact that this was utterly unattractive to me did not worry her sufficiently, if at all, to stop this senseless, ugly and disorganised onslaught on society which wasn't in the slightest bit interested in her protest. We had endless arguments about her slovenliness, which at times she made momentary and futile efforts to overcome. When it came into her restless and wild mind to please me for a moment, I could never accept it, and I resented my inability to do so. For what is there in clothes, in appearance, in gracious living other than a diversion of one's creative fulfilment, whatever it may be? Compared to being a good person, and one of the kind of intelligence which helps one measure and cope with the problem of survival in one's era, what are clothes and graciousness? Nothing, of course. But they form part of a desire which one longs to fulfil.

When at any time Ria felt particularly low, she would try to give one the impression that her slovenliness was a direct result and exhibition of her mood. That night she was in a bad and sullen mood.

'What's up with you today?' I asked her.

'I'm fed up. Can't you see?' she said.

'I can see alright. Is there anything in particular that's upset you?' I asked.

We were sitting in our lounge, neither of us doing anything, neither of us having interrupted anything we had been doing, such as reading a paper or something. Her mood pervaded the whole room. She had put on the most unattractive light and the room was cold and uncomfortable. I went over to change the light.

'Why the hell must you put on this ugly light and just sit there like that?' I asked, my voice raised and angry. I hated to see her give in like this to her wretched mood.

'I can sit like this if I want to', she said.

'You can sit like that for a week if you want to', I said.

I suppose other people can be considerate and patient with people who are depressed. I can't. For some obscure reason, this depression is like a red cloth to me, and I get uncontrollably furious. I felt like getting up and getting hold of Ria by the neck and throwing her out of the room. Instead we sat in silence for some time. She had one more cigarette in the packet she was using. She lit it a minute after she'd put one out. Her box of matches was also nearly used up. She had to strike about nine before she got a light. She had a habit of putting spent matches back into the box.

'You don't have to sit there and keep me company', she said.

'I like looking at you', I said. 'You're such a pretty sight. I get a kick out of watching things which make me sick'.

'Oh, leave me alone. So I'm filthy. So I'm a slut. Leave me alone'.

I know I was needling her by just sitting there and doing nothing, the same as she was. One can annoy people very simply that way, by making oneself a mirror for their image.

'What's Aaron been up to, to upset you like that?' I asked. 'Been calling you rude names? What the hell's the matter with you?' I shouted at her.

'Yes, that's right. Go ahead and shout. Come and hit me. Go on. Kill me for it. I can't help it if I'm depressed'.

When she said, 'Go on. Kill me', she really meant it. I don't mean to say that she would have liked me to kill her at that moment, but I don't think she would have resisted. And there was nothing brave about this, nothing heroic. She seemed to be simply without any resistance during these black moods, utterly forlorn. (Years ago, I suddenly remember, she once described to me her love for for the word 'forlorn':

Seeest Thou yon dreary Plain, forlorn and wild,  
The seat of Desolation, voyd of Light  
Save what the glimmering of these livid flames  
Casts pale and dreadful? . . . . . she had quoted  
Milton apropos of some beggar woman who was seated on  
some stone steps, resting, staring in front of her, as if thus  
to await her last breath).

I tried again, gently this time. I thought trying to make her go to bed to sleep it off would be the simplest way to break her mood that night.

'Why don't you go to bed?' I asked.

'Because I want to sit here. D'you mind?'

'Not at all. I enjoy your company enormously'.

'Well if you don't like it, why the hell don't you get out? Leave me alone', she shouted, almost hysterical.

I shouted back: 'Don't you shout at me you stupid slut. Sitting there like a useless bitch . . . . .'

'Yes, yes, yes. Come on. Let's have all the abuse, all the usual phrases - stupid slut, useless bitch - come on let's have the others too, the juicier ones'. She was stubbing out her last cigarette and I wasn't going to give her one of mine. When a soldier's rations run out, he is ready for the last fight. Anger humiliates. Had I given her a cigarette she would have taken it. But she wouldn't ask me for one. Not for anything. To ask me for something at this point would have spoilt her mood, by breaking the independence of her loneliness. 'With all his faults', she suddenly said 'at least Aaron hasn't got your foul temper'.

'And I don't suppose you let your lousy moods loose

on him, do you. Oh no. He'd run a mile if he had to cope with your exhilarating depressions twice or three times a week. They're great fun'.

'D'you think I enjoy them?' she asked, pointing at herself, tears running down her stiffened face.

'Yes you do', I said.

'Oh, you're stupid. You really are stupid'.

'You're repeating yourself'.

'In any case, Aaron is leaving'.

'I see. That's what it's all about. Who said he was leaving?'

'I said so. I told him to go'.

'You told him to go?'

'Yes. He's going to find a room somewhere near Jack'.

We were silent for a while, then she said: 'I should have gone away with him a year ago'.

'You should have done'.

'I know'.

Apart from wishing to protect Ria and thereby exercising power over her, I had a further reason for my quite genuine desire not to let Aaron go. One might think this feeling was the cheap brutality of the cruel victor who wishes to make his victim die slowly, who wishes to revenge every humiliation he has suffered. No. That was not my reason for not wishing to let Aaron go. I detest victory. I detest the answer. I detest conclusion. Again, that has, I know, to do with my fear of death. If Aaron went away and left Ria behind, I would have to face with her the next stage of my life. One grows old not by oneself but only with other people. That is why I wanted him to stay. The need one has for other people is ruthless.

'I'll talk to him when he comes in'.

'What about?'

'Why should he go from here?'

'I told him to go. I want him to go'.

'And tomorrow you'll want him to stay again'.

'If I do, I'll let you know', she said, and once more,

after this arrogant interruption, she was ready to revert to her mood of despondency.

After some time of silence, she got up to go to the kitchen to look for some cigarettes. I'm sure she knew perfectly well that there weren't any there, but nevertheless she went looking for them. After her search she would put the kettle on to make some tea. I followed her out a few minutes later. She put some tea in a sieve, put it on a cup, and poured some water over it. She just made one cup for herself. She didn't think of anyone else that night.

'What d'you keep following me around for?' she asked me. 'Haven't you got anything better to do?'

'When I find something better to do I'll do it', I said stupidly, 'but in the meantime, I'll follow you round'.

'Yes, that's just about all you ever do', she said, almost to herself, very quickly, because she knew it was a dangerous thing for her to say. And then, having overcome that phrase, she started to rant away, fearlessly, and watched my anger rise to a point quite beyond my control. 'I know why you want Aaron to stay but he isn't going to stay for that reason. If he goes, you're saddled with me. That's what you think. But don't worry. I want you as little as you want me. You can both go to hell', she shouted.

At this point, quite senselessly, I hit her. I hit her fairly hard. I have large hands and a heavy arm.

'Don't you couple me with him, you demented idiot. I'm the one to tell the two of you to go to hell and get out of this house'.

I must have hit her again, because a moment later she was lying on the floor writhing with pain. She got up very quickly, but I didn't see her face because she'd covered it with her hands. She went out of the kitchen and I heard her put on her coat in the hall and leave the house. I was limp with anger.

She had left the house a few times before when she had been in a state of acute depression, and I always seemed



to be, not always the cause of her running away, but the person she wished to run away from. She could walk very fast, and unless I went after her immediately she could reach the first cross-roads, and the chance of finding her was diminished by seventy-five per cent. That night, by the time I decided to go after her, I was too late. At the cross-roads, I turned right, because that led towards the railway-line which passes two streets behind us. There was a light fog, and the air was moist, the road, glistening. I called for her, unashamedly I shouted her name into the night, uncaring about one or two people pushing back their curtains to see who it was who was shouting. I whistled through my fingers and thought surely she could not yet have gone far enough not to hear me. And the louder I called and whistled, the more frantic I became. There was nothing for me to do other than call the police. I ran back to our house, and as I went through our gate, I noticed it was beginning to rain again. The rain was light but fast, and by the time I reached our door, which I'd left open, it began to rain heavily. The children had heard me call out Ria's name and they were sitting on the stairs their faces drunk with sleep and their lovely eyes wide open and curious. I took them to bed, and as I came downstairs again, I heard Ria come up our path. She came back like an animal which finds shelter when it begins to rain.

I did not wait for Aaron to come back. He must have returned very late, because I did not hear him come in. I took Ria up to bed, undressed her, and then held her in my arms to make her warm. She cried herself to sleep. Who it was who held her in his arms that night to make her warm did not matter.

## XXI

When the next night I asked Aaron whether he was leaving the house he said, 'I don't know?'

He shrugged his shoulders as if to say to me he was quite prepared to be persuaded to stay.

I told Ria I was going and I found myself a room. So I go'.

'It's entirely up to you. You don't have to go', I said. 'I thought Ria wanted you to go?' I asked. I was curious to know who had taken the decision for him to go.

'Yeah, she does', he said. 'That's right. Besides, I'm making too much of a mess with all my equipment'.

'If you need a room for your work, get yourself a room for that. But I'd like you to go on living here', I said to him.

'Gee, thanks', he said.

The day after he moved out. He had been there in the morning when I'd left the house, but by the time I returned in the evening he had gone. He had agreed to stay, Ria told me, but had moved out as a result of some further argument they'd had that day. He'd obviously made up his mind to go, and Ria, for some reason, was not too upset about it. Is it possible that our maid who left us in December, about a week before Mariella arrived, had surprised them and that they were now frightened to carry on their affair in our house? I don't know and I don't care. What outsiders thought of our *ménage à trois*, never entered my mind. As far as I was concerned, the battle which was going on in our relationship was quite normal and integral to our lives. What I find despicable about his moving out of our house, now I think of it, is the way he did it. The same way he'd slipped in when I'd been away, the same way he'd slipped out. There was no

formality about his entry or his exit, there was no responsibility assumed because it was for Aaron easier to stall and hide behind a façade of delinquency and cowardice. The world is always big enough for us to find a hiding-place, but our emotions give us the imperfect values which cling to us, the conscience we carry in our stupid head, which binds us and prevents us from hiding unless we are insensitive to our responsibilities. All men who are irresponsible to one another are parasites.

I fear that I am beginning to judge before I have come to the present, the last few weeks, the last few days, the moment when I can put down my pen to mete out whatever justice I decide on for Aaron. But obviously, in the formulation of a decision, certain events crystallise into guilt, or innocence, for that matter, which make one impatient to pronounce judgment before it is due.

I do not know what was the actual cause of Aaron's move at this particular moment. He and Ria were right in the middle of their film which was getting on famously. Aaron had emerged from his ludicrous hibernation, and for the first time in his life, he stood a chance of proving himself in his work. I do not think that our maid surprising them could have caused his move because Ria had gradually won her absolute devotion and confidence. In fact she must have long since known about the affair. She was in our house for three years and did not go out very much. Can it be that the time had come for Aaron to make one final stand, one final move to win Ria completely, to make her leave me and the children? He could not take my place in my own house, and therefore he had to move outside it to make her come to him. Most probably he confronted her with the choice of leaving with him or of staying with me, which proves that both wished to own the decision for him to move out. She must have decided not to go with him, not to leave me or the children, and what is more, I am convinced that Aaron deliberately asked her at the wrong moment. Yes,

that is what she had meant by saying that she should have gone away with him a year ago. A year ago, perhaps, she had been ready for him. The moment he felt sure she would refuse him, he offered to marry her, and with her refusal in hand, he felt justified in going towards his artistic victory alone. I am convinced I am right about this. Everything points to it. He had schemed things very well.

He moved into a large ground-floor room which he littered with his belongings. (He left his books behind in our house and I still haven't decided what to do with them). Within a short time, the room had assumed his character, and had about it an air of disintegration. He was in an old crumbling Victorian house in Belsize Park. I used to drop in from time to time to chat with him or to pick up Ria.

'You should have seen the rushes today boy', he said when I picked up Ria one evening. 'Fabulous. Go, on, tell him honey', he said to her.

'They're very good. He's got some really lovely shots. You know at Piccadilly there . . . . ' she described to me, 'they're really very good'.

'Give me another month on the film and I'll show those jokers. I'll get work anywhere. The B.B.C. wants to buy the film'.

'What?' Ria asked, flabbergasted and almost in tears at being told the important news in such an off-hand way.

'Yeah', he said in a tone which dismissed her surprise. 'A guy came up to me the other day, said they wanted to do a programme on London, would I sell. Would I sell f . . . . ! This film's for cinemas, I said, not lousy TV. Sell you some of the throw-outs, I said to him. And he said O.K. They wrote to me about it this morning'.

'But this is marvellous Aaron', Ria said, overjoyed. 'Aren't you pleased?'

'Pleased? Why not particularly. What the hell, now they all come, but I got my price, baby. They ain't buying

nothing cheap from me. They want me to state my price. How much d'you think I can ask?' he asked me.

'I haven't a clue. I really don't know'.

'How much do they want?' Ria asked.

'Just an extract'.

'Twenty pounds a minute?' Ria suggested.

'Twenty pounds a minute? Are you in your right mind baby? Twenty bloody pounds a f . . . g minute. You gone crazy? Seven-fifty a minute. I thought at first a thousand, but I'm willing to let it go at seven fifty a minute'.

'You're nuts', I said.

'You think so, do you?' he said smiling gently. 'Well, we'll see'.

It was time for us to go and Ria asked, 'Will you pick me up tomorrow? What time are you going into town?'

'Usual time'.

'Do you want me to come in with you?'

'If you want to. Please yourself'.

'I'll be at the house at two if you want to pick me up', she said.

'Come on, let's go', she said to me, 'he doesn't know what he wants'.

We'd both noticed the symptoms of megalomania in Aaron, but we weren't sure whether he'd been serious or not.

'He'll get corrupted with success', Ria said, 'if it ever comes his way. He's a good cameraman but he hasn't a clue how to direct, and he won't work as a cameraman'

'Why not?'

'Because he won't work under anybody else. He wants to be independent. Well, let him be'.

'Surely they don't pay that much money for a few minutes of film?' I asked her.

'Of course not. He's mad. They'll laugh at him if he asks that much'.

She then told me how she felt that he was somehow

trying to push her out of the film. 'I don't think he wants me to work with him any more'.

'I don't think that's true', I said. 'He needs you and he knows it. Perhaps he's a bit cocky at the moment, but he depends on you for ideas, whether he admits it or not, and for pushing him into doing any work at all – even now he's getting a little closer to some success'.

'I know he needs me, but I don't think *he* knows. He doesn't know how destructive he is. In the end he'll destroy himself. He's made all kinds of unpleasant remarks to me this week since he left the house. I don't think I'll work with him much longer. Let him find somebody else to carry around his recording-machine. It's no good anyway'.

He was beginning to use this little recording-machine as an extension of his power. Instead of using it as an integral part of his amateur unit, with which he was trying to shoot a professional film, he started to regard it as a personal favour to allow anybody to use it. It is quite a simple and uncomplicated instrument which you sling over your shoulder and which records sounds through a microphone which you hold in your hand. It was literally useless for their purpose as it picked up every noise without selection. Next to the camera itself it was the favourite piece of equipment to be handled by his hangers on. He was beginning to gather a little group of these around him. 'The Fawkes entourage', we called it. Their aim was to worm themselves somehow into working on any film. Any film maker has for such people the aura of a prospector and they share his fever and strange enthusiasm. Because of this they'll work for nothing and they'll come out at any time to do anything that is required. By and large, these people on the fringe of the film world are exceedingly dull and unimaginative. They have the minds and the mentality of clerks and after a year or two of petty intrigue and frustration, they usually end up as such. Aaron had no need of this entourage at all. There

was nothing for them to do. But they followed him around faithfully, about five or six of them, prepared for his slightest whim and most ludicrous command.

I have really nothing more to tell about last summer. Events moved on in their normal course. There was no less tension in the house because Aaron had left. Ria, having maintained her position on the film in spite of an endless number of petty arguments, was busy each day helping to edit what was shot, and re-taking sound-tracks an endless number of times. She was out a good deal. Last summer was wet and cold. I have always dreaded the winters after such summers. When you are sick, you feel your lowest in the night. More people die at night than during the day. If the day has been bad and painful the night can be terrible.

## XXII

In November, Ria's father died. He died at five a.m. on a Monday morning, after a heart attack the previous night. I had taken Ria out for dinner the evening before, and when we returned our front door was open, all the lights were on, and our maid was up and in tears waiting for Ria to come back to tell her that her mother had rung to say that she should come home at once. She had even packed Ria's bag. Ria's parents lived about a three and a half hour's train journey from London. I took her and her younger brother who had also come to our house to wait for her, straight to the station to catch the last train out that night. When I rang her in the morning, Ria told me: 'Poppa died at five this morning'.

She was crying, and in her broken voice there was a note of despair I shall never forget. There were times when Ria cried, when she was upset, like a child, when she was beaten and innocent at the same time, when she moved me more than any other person has ever done. Her father was a sweet man, and I loved him.

I travelled down to N. that evening. Aaron came with me, as well as a friend of the family. We arrived about midnight and I went on alone to the house. They were sitting watch over the coffin and Ria and her mother were lying down in one room, weeping and lamenting.

'An angel has passed away', Ria's mother said to me as I came into the room. 'An angel'.

For a while I sat with Ria, and then she got up for a moment to take me to the front room where the coffin stood. I had never been into a house, let alone a room, where a dead man lay, and I was at first afraid to go in. But once I was in that room, I found it, as Ria had forewarned, most peaceful. The coffin was draped in a purple



cloth and the night-lights were burning on the mantle-piece. I do not want to go into all the details here about my feelings and impressions that night, because next to the one feeling which was all-powerful and which is relevant to my story, the others have subsided into the limbo of experience, which exists like the lymph in your blood, colourless and essential for life. After I had stood bewildered by the coffin for some time, and after my mind had begun to adjust itself to a peacefulness which I had never in any way associated with death, I began to think of Ria and myself and the children. One head of a family lay dead in this coffin and I desired more children. I stayed in that room all night, at times alone, at times with other people who came to sit watch over the coffin. At two o'clock the next day they took the coffin away for burial.

Accompanying my desire for more children was a feeling of great tenderness towards Ria during these sad days. Naturally, she needed protection and tenderness, but my feelings for her went beyond this. Is it, I have wondered these last ten days (everything I think of now she has gone, has to be tested on myself alone), that I loved her most dearly when she was sad? Is that the reason why at times we were so unhappy together, why I drove her (at least it seems as if I drove her to it, though God knows I had no conscious purpose behind me), to the point of tears over and over again? Can a state of happiness only be measured by an amount of laughter and not by tears as well? I don't know any more what to think about it all. She should not have killed herself. She has no excuse for this. You have no right to leave in the middle of an argument. So much between us was not yet resolved. I am sure in our own way we were no less happy than people who do not know how to cry, who are hard and resilient, who are content all their lives to walk in inches instead of in feet and yards. She should not have killed herself.

I did not take much notice of Aaron the day of the

funeral. He came to the house in the morning, stayed around and I saw him at the funeral and again at the house later on. He went home that night, whilst I stayed on a few more days.

Neither was I concerned about Aaron's feelings when he came down for the funeral, but when I learned about them from Ria later on, I was incensed. I did not know why when she told me it hurt me so much, but now I begin to feel outraged by his whole behaviour these past four years. I even feel this outrage against my will, because I desire the friendship of all people who knew Ria. But with this feeling inside me, I shall never be able to count him as a friend again unless I kill him. For he asked her, with a crudeness she might even have admired, to bear him a child. He asked her this on the very day of her father's funeral. Perhaps this was his way of saying that he still wanted her, and that her knowledge of this would bring her some solace on that miserable day. Perhaps he could think of nothing else to say to comfort her, for being shallow in his thoughts, I am sure he felt the polite urge to speak rather than be silent on such an occasion. Above all, though, I am convinced that he thought he was doing his duty by making this request. Also, he could hold her refusal against her in the months to come. Again the timing was quite deliberate, cunning, and by now, typical of his method of impeccable cowardice. But what disgusted me more than anything else was that he had had the very same feeling as I had had myself on that day.

When Ria told me about this, I really felt for the very first time how very far her relationship with Aaron had gone. She told me late in December, just a few days before Aaron was to make his famous TV appearance. Things by then were going very badly between them, and the more they did so, the more she talked to me, the more she told me about Aaron and herself. Do not forget her pride if you think that she wanted now to arouse my pity,

my desire to protect her, or my feelings for her, so that the moment Aaron was out of her life I would take her back completely. She had never left me, nor I her. No. She had to save those four years for herself. They could not be discarded as a waste of time, as years to be despised by future years. She simply wanted my help to save those years.

I did not see very much of Aaron any more. In fact, I only saw him once, I remember, before his TV appearance. Early on in December, he had a severe fever. Apparently he had had a bad cold, but had taken no notice of it and had gone on working in the cold November air. One night, he collapsed and Ria took him back to his room and put him to bed. She came home in a very nervous and agitated state and I helped her move a bed into our lounge which was warm and could be made comfortable. Having helped to prepare his sickbed, I was to go over to persuade him to come back for his illness, so that he could be looked after, as there was no-one available at his new place. I went to him. His room was in darkness, but I could see him, propped up in bed, by the light of the street-lamp outside his large window. I switched on the light, enquired how he was feeling and then explained to him the purpose of my visit.

'I'm alright here', he said.

The doctor whom Ria had called, had prescribed medicine for him which he had to take every four hours, night and day. I asked him how he'd wake up to take it.

'I'll manage O.K.' he said.

'Listen', I said, 'You're not well enough at the moment to be stubborn. You've got a bad fever and you need looking after. Don't be such an ass. You can't look after yourself when you're in such a state. Either you go into a hospital or you come over to our place'.

He would not budge. I tried to break down his resistance by every possible means, because I was genuinely worried about him and the room depressed me.

'I don't like going backwards', he said. 'Now I've moved out, I've got to face the consequences. I can't go around all my life looking for people to tuck me in'.

'When you're ill, you forget other things for the time being', I said to him. 'If I didn't know you were ill, I wouldn't care tuppence about you lying here and rotting away in your room. But as I do know, I feel responsible'.

'Thanks', he said, 'thanks a lot. But I'll be O.K. Jack can come over to look after me'.

'But Jack's in Paris', I told him.

'Yeah, but he'll be back sometime this week'.

'O.K.', I said to him, 'See you on TV. You've got about a fortnight to get well'.

Ria laughed about his stubbornness when I helped her clear up our lounge after I got back. 'He knows damn well he'll be looked after even if he doesn't come here. He's an inconsiderate sod. I'll only have to go over to feed him. We ought to let the bugger starve over there'.

'I think he'd like that', I said, 'provided he were sure his martyrdom would become famous'.

'Oh, I wouldn't tell anyone', she said laughing.

He was very ill for about ten days, and once when the fever was at its height Ria stayed with him all night, sitting vigil over him, wiping his sweating face with Eau-De-Cologne, and making him comfortable after his bouts of delirium. Jack had not returned and no one knew where he was staying in Paris to get in touch with him. After ten days the fever subsided, and though he was rather weak for the first few days he got up, and soon gathered strength again and went about.

A few days before his Television debut, Ria, who had a key to his place, found a girl in his room, waiting for him. Her name was Latscha. Aaron apparently had met her a few days before. I was never to find out very much about her, as I only met her once. All the rest I know about her, I learnt from Ria. She also told me the things Aaron said about her. She was a dark-haired Polish Catholic in

her late 'twenties. The most striking thing about her were her large teeth which were brilliantly white and obviously the joy of her face. She had a deep voice and a rather moist diction.

'That's his new girl-friend', Ria said to me. 'What a swine he is, what a bloody coward. He can't even tell me about her. Oh no. I said I'd go in at eleven to pick up a roll of film on my way to town. So he deliberately makes that bitch hang around there the same time so that I run into her. I'll kill him', she said. 'He's scum'.

'Listen', I said, to calm her. 'How do you know she's his girl-friend? Did you talk to her?'

'No, she tried to talk to me. I got the film and went out'.

When she got into town Aaron wasn't there. She waited for him for about an hour, visiting their usual places in case she'd misunderstood where they were supposed to meet. But he didn't turn up all that day.

Her fury did not die down that night. 'I wonder', she said, 'whether he left here because of her. I wouldn't put it past him. Yet every day he keeps on telling me that he loves me', she said. The more her feeling of being rejected was eating into her the more open she became with me. She was becoming desperate and all the barriers of propriety as far as she was concerned, could now come down. She had nothing more to lose.

'The day of Pop's funeral he told me he wanted to have a child. That was five weeks ago last Monday. That girl's obviously been there before. She knows the place. I noticed the room was rather tidy the other day. He said Jack had cleaned up. Jack, my foot. It was that girl. Well I'm sorry for her. Jack called him a monster the other day. He hates him'.

She ranted on about him the whole evening. I let her. She let out quite a few things that I hadn't known before, but quite frankly I wasn't particularly interested. I enjoyed watching her. I genuinely enjoyed her private exhibition

of hate and passion, her fight against a hopeless situation which she was somehow trying to save. Her eyes, her dark brown eyes, were marvellous that night, glowing with anger, and her voice was sharp, her words confused at times, but at moments incisive and deadly accurate. She was like a fish, a beautiful glittering fish caught in the net, alive and struggling to the very last moment, and fighting at its hardest the moment it knows that the odds are against it, and that the fight must be lost. There is a dignity in the victim which makes all survivors look cheap, wanton and lost.

What made me side with Ria above all, was my feeling about Aaron's rejection of her.

How dared Aaron, I felt, reject Ria. How did he dare to hurt her, to make her, of all people feel unwanted? How did he love her or understand her if he could now malign her, abuse her, live without her? Maybe you will say that I was projecting my own guilt onto Aaron and cursing him for being ruthless enough to do the things that I had been too weak to do. But that is not true. Had I not looked upon Aaron as a brother, whom you cannot reject whether you want to or not, other than by murdering him? And was he not, by rejecting Ria, rejecting me? He was. That is why he outraged me now, and why I cursed him, and why I felt violent towards him. I was even afraid of my violence. That is why I did not even go near him for some time. I avoided him, lest I should want to kill him, without having given him a trial.

## XXIII

When Ria confronted him about Latscha the next day, he laughed at her anger.

'Don't be stupid, honey', he said to her.

'What d'you mean, don't be stupid. Why didn't you tell me about her?'

'There's nothing to tell for Chrissake. Can't I have a bloody woman coming in here without you shooting your mouth off?'

'Then who is she?' Ria asked. 'I'm entitled to know, aren't I?'

'She's some lousy Polish peasant. She makes me sick. She's been hanging around since Jack told her about the TV show. She thinks I'm famous. Well, I ain't famous yet, I told her. But she's dumb. Jesus Christ is she stupid. She takes no f . . . g notice what you tell her'.

I am sure that Aaron allowed Latscha to make advances at him because she flattered him about his ensuing fame. As far as Aaron was concerned, he was taken in by this flattery like the blackbird by the fox. Also, he needed her to protect him against Ria's now frequent attacks. He used her like the Nazis used children ahead of their troops so that the enemy might, by a feeling of humanity, be diverted from attacking. For days on end she would not be around and Ria would laugh the whole thing off. Then she would suddenly reappear and the nagging confusion would start again.

A clerk is a servant who must always be prepared for orders, execute them promptly, and if he wants to be superior in his work, he has to scheme ahead a little, so that his brain will not be overtaxed when he receives his next command. I am always delighted when a tiny observation I have made years before, which I could not properly

explain at the time, reveals itself years later. I am hopeless at crossword puzzles, but I am sure that for those who are good at them, to find the correct clue gives the same pleasure I derive from finding the revelation of some small problem. I had sometimes wondered why Aaron wore one or two rubber bands about his wrist. I thought at one time it had to do with the need to tie up a finished film, but they are not used for that. When I went to the bank about a fortnight ago to draw out some money, I noticed the clerk wearing rubber bands which he used to tie up his bundles of notes. Until that moment I had quite forgotten that Aaron had worked at one time as a clerk in his father's bank, and the habit had obviously stuck.

This revelation has given me the clue to the enormous store Aaron set by his television appearance and the events that resulted directly from it. I have never seen a person so transformed after a single event in his life. People apparently undergo a change of personality after certain brain operations, but I have never known anyone who has undergone such an operation. We had, of course, become familiar with Aaron's chameleon-like quality of change after he had his rotten teeth taken out, but his change of behaviour at that time was nothing compared to what was in store for us now. Besides, his first change had some kind of physical cause. Do not clerks dream above all of power? Do not always the slaves dream of their masters, and never the masters of their slaves?

He was to appear on the screen for a one-minute spot interview. For another minute there were to be a few shots of the buskers and the fee he was being paid was thirty guineas for the lot.

He went to the studio the day before for a rehearsal, and they put make-up on his face which he didn't wash off although he went out to a restaurant with Ria that night. Everybody kept staring at him. He said it was good practise for him to be stared at, as he had to get used to it between then and the following night when millions of



viewers would be doing exactly that. She described the evening to me when she got home, and I didn't believe her.

'But it's true', she said.

'You're making it up', I said. 'You're lying'.

'Honestly. What's more, he got annoyed with me for making fun of him. He was furious with me. I was so embarrassed, I didn't know what to do. I said to one of the waiters who served us, 'I'm sorry, but my friend's come over queer'. He laughed and winked at me but Aaron nearly had a fit'.

'What did he say?' I asked.

'Cut out those cracks', he said. 'What d'you think actors do? Think they go home wash their faces every two minutes to take their make-up off? I'm rehearsing, don't you see? What d'you think it feels like being stared at by three million stupid people? And what about afterwards? I'll have to walk round for the rest of my life with everybody recognising me, everybody staring at me. I got to get used to it'.

'He's crazy', I said.

'I think he's really going mad. I'm quite worried. Seriously', Ria said.

The programme the next night started at ten past seven. We had no television in the house, so Ria decided to go and watch it over at Jack's, whilst I went with Klein to a flat of a friend of his who was out that night, and who had offered us the use of his set. Klein switched it on, but he must have turned the wrong knob because in a minute there was a tremendous noise and a picture of nothing but swimming lines. He persisted in trying his luck further with these knobs, but the more he did so, the more erratic became the abstract performance on the screen. In the end, I tried. It was a fight against time as the programme had certainly started. At best we might see a few seconds of it. I got Aaron's voice on but was too anxious to get the picture to listen to what he was saying. I did get the picture but could not hold it still. There

was Aaron talking, I think to one of the buskers, contortioning and somersaulting about the place, disappearing and coming on again, being put through the mangle because of our inefficiency with a TV set. When his voice disappeared and his two minutes were up, we turned the damn thing off in utter disgust.

We laughed at our misadventure, and resolved, though we had not seen it, to praise Aaron for his excellent performance. Had we told him the truth he might have accused us of having deliberately avoided seeing him at his supreme moment, out of jealousy and envy. As I have said, he had become extremely sensitive to his position in the world, and he was prepared to use any argument or any contrivance of fact or fiction to maintain his position. Since we took the whole thing as a joke, we were quite prepared to lie to please him.

We went back to our house and when Ria came in we told her what had happened to us. Her face was flushed with excitement, and suddenly she let out a stream of abuse which she delivered with practised arrogance.

'You didn't go to see it at all', she said. 'You've been to some coffee-house. Don't give me that story of not being able to turn on a television set. You don't have to be a genius for that. Why don't you just say you didn't bother to see it? At least you'd be honest'.

We were laughing at her annoyance.

'And I don't think it's funny, if you want to know. If one of you had been on TV you'd have expected everybody to look at you, but because it's Aaron, oh, it doesn't matter. You know', she said, 'I think you're jealous of him'.

Klein has a habit of rolling on his seat when he laughs hard.

'I'm jealous of Aaron', he mock-cried. 'Why did he do it? Now I won't be able to finish my book, and he', he said, pointing at me, 'he won't be able to finish his book, and nobody will be able to finish their books any more; there won't be any more books. Literature has been killed

tonight, a god has appeared for two minutes tonight on TV and he has killed art. Oh I feel terrible. I feel terrible!’

‘And I don’t think you’re being very funny, Klein’, Ria said, ‘and your mockery doesn’t impress me’.

‘No seriously, Ria’, Klein said, switching back to his usual voice. ‘We really tried to see it, but we couldn’t work the set. I suppose we should have gone up earlier to experiment, but I thought it was quite simple to turn it on’.

‘It is, and that’s why I know you didn’t even try’.

‘But we did’, I shouted at her.

‘No, don’t’, Klein said to me. He was afraid I was going to start a row. ‘What was he like?’ Klein asked.

‘I thought he was very good. He was terribly nervous when he went there. But he sounded quite relaxed. I think he did very well’.

‘You mean you did very well’, Klein complimented her. ‘D’you think Aaron would have ever thought of making a film without you? D’you think he would have even got as far as this without you?’

She was willing to take the compliment, but not gracefully.

‘Well then you should have made a real effort to see him, if only for my sake’, she ranted. ‘I’m disgusted with both of you’.

‘Oh shut up’, I said to her. I was angry at her insistence that we had not tried.

‘Well’, Klein said philosophically, ‘I hope he’ll appear again. Next time, I shall come with you to watch him’.

We all left the house and drove over to Aaron’s place. He’d told Ria he was going straight home, and we’d given him time to get back.

As we drew up to his house, he was standing, facing the road at the top of the steep stone steps that led up to the entrance of his house. It was a cold and dark night, but the street-lamp threw a beam of light right on the steps, so that he stood upon them as on a stage, spotlit.

We let Ria get out of the car first to greet him. By the

time she was half-way up the steps, we were on the pavement below. She went up to kiss Aaron on the cheek, and he stood there, with his camel-hair coat slung over his shoulders, still and impassive as a statue. Klein called up a greeting at him.

'Hullo Aaron. How was it?'

I am sure Aaron did not suspect that we had not seen his appearance. He probably thought we'd all been to Jack's place. But Klein, being a very suspicious person himself wanted to make sure of driving away any suspicion from Aaron's mind and said,

'You were wonderful. It came over very well'.

The distance he stood from Aaron, the dark and his moustache, hid the faint smile on his face. Only I saw it. Ria played our game, at least for the time being. I don't know whether or not she told Aaron the truth later on. Aaron stood upon the steps and bowed gently to acknowledge Klein's words of applause.

A fine elegant smile came over his face which expressed the gratitude of a great actor at the end of his performance. I did not see his eyelids in the bad light, but I am sure they dropped several times, like the curtain whose rise and fall measures an actor's triumph.

The idea had been to pick up Aaron and to go to one of the coffee-houses for an hour or so. But Aaron was not in the mood. He said he wanted to sit alone in his room without switching the light on.

'I got to get used to this', he said to us. 'Excuse me to-night'.

He went into the house. We discussed for a moment where we would go and went back to the car. By the time we drove off, there was still no light on in his room.

## XXIV

I have forgotten how many days or weeks later Aaron announced that he was going to marry Latscha. Why can't I remember the exact day? I remember other things, far deeper in the past, quite clearly and more vividly than I can describe, but the day he announced this great event I cannot remember. Is it my blindness again which is cured only by time, which washes away like the sea the shells of oysters in the hope of finding pearls? No. Once you have learnt to see you do not forget. As chaos has come into my life, I have forgotten how to dream. Not to dream any more is the tight muslin of age. You cannot remember the day you are born. Neither can you remember the day age sets in to wither you. All I know, is that the day Aaron told Ria that he was taking Latscha for a wife he cut the rope which had held her to life.

She cried that day the way I imagined the children would cry whenever I contemplated leaving Ria. I thought several times I would leave her, the same way as I thought several times about her death. When one cannot hold on any longer, when there is no more hope in sight, one first wishes the death of someone near, and then one's own. I have learnt that there is nothing callous in that wish.

When Ria told me of Aaron's plan for marriage, she had the very same sadness in her voice as she had when she told me of her father's death. The fact that there was no anger in her voice, no note of hatred even, made her noble in my eyes to a degree which was equalled only by my disgust of Aaron. Should I, at this point, have seen myself as the victor of the situation? Maybe I did. I do not remember, and therefore it cannot have been of importance to me. After all, I had never lost Ria, and I had not been fighting for any kind of victory. There is

conceit in what I say and arrogance, but I had always felt that if Ria and I were to spend the rest of our lives together, we had to make sure by every means that this was right and this included above all the trial to get away from each other. For real love is a prison in which you die, unless you keep alive by trying to break out.

At the time, I felt outraged by Aaron's rejection of her. I even felt he was rejecting my children, and I was roused by this to such violent hatred that I set out several times to go over to his place to maim him. I wanted to make him blind in one eye and I remember testing on a pillow which part of my fist was the sharpest to penetrate his eye-socket. I remember my body becoming hard at the prospect of violence, so strong that nothing could hurt me until I had dealt my blow. Perhaps I did not fulfil my desire at the time because I enjoyed savouring it more than to see it fulfilled. Besides there still was a chance that he would reverse his decision to marry Latscha. He still saw Ria almost every day, and in the beginning she was still fighting her battle. A fortnight ago, four days before the wedding, she told me that their affair was still going on for a time during Aaron's engagement. I had no right, therefore, to interfere with Ria's battle until it was resolved. Had I attacked him then, I would have driven them apart for ever, because Aaron would not have come near her any more. Would she have been alive today? And am I to blame? Soon I will know.

There are fatal diseases in which the patient fluctuates between great pain and apparent well-being. I remember snippets of the past, odd bits of things I have read in the newspapers, broken parts of stories I have heard people tell over the years. They are like a worm which has been cut in two, one part of which lives on whilst the other dessicates. They are like a bone stuck in your mind. A man who had cancer suddenly had no more pain. He went back to his office and died that same day at his desk which stood in a room he was sharing with four other people. A

mother sent out her three year old child to a grocer's shop for some shillings. Then she put the shillings in the gas meter to kill herself and the child. In a school blaze in which eighty-seven children were killed, firemen found a class of twenty-four dead at their desks, their geography books open before them. Ria was fine some of the time. At moments, she forgot her misery, played and laughed with the children, talked to people as if everything was quite normal in her life. But the mood of relief never lasted for long. Suddenly, as if for a moment she had been tricked into laughter, like a child, she would revert to anguish, with a little severity even, as if she was angry at having had her mood broken.

At first Ria's mood of tears and laughter was fairly regular, so that there seemed to be an equal amount of both. Gradually her hysteria became melancholic, and her depressions more and more uninterrupted. I think I am right in this remembrance of the past, though I am not quite sure any more. I do not trust my memory of it. It is filled with some kind of inexplicable disbelief. I cannot clearly remember which of her moods outweighed the other. I only suspect it was the tearful and silent melancholia. When Mariella knocked at my door yesterday to call me for lunch, I turned round and expected Ria's father to enter, like the Commendatore in *'Don Giovanni'*, to avenge his daughter's death. And I see Ria all about the house. The toothpaste smudge on the glass shelf in the bathroom, she never screws the cap on after use. The rod in her cupboard has collapsed under the weight of her dresses and coats. It has been like that for three weeks and she keeps on wearing the same dress every day, because she can't be bothered to clean up the mess in her wardrobe. I think of these things and suddenly I feel a cold hard touch on my thigh. It is the small bottle with the screw-top I carry in my pocket. It is still there, but tomorrow I might throw it away although it was the last object which Ria touched.

She had a 'phone call one morning from Latscha. She rang after I had left the house for work, and asked Ria to meet her that night in a café near where we live. Ria rang me at the office and told me about it. She imitated Latscha's deep voice and her wet Polish accent. She was laughing and joking about it.

'What on earth do you want to meet her for?' I asked.

'I don't, but since she asked me, I have to go'.

I am quite sure that it was Aaron who made Latscha contact Ria and that Latscha was too stupid to see that she was being used to try to establish a new triangle. He wanted Latscha to be friends with Ria so that he could deceive her, and derive precarious strength and pleasure from his deception of her. He was not able to transform. He had to repeat his pattern.

Ria went off soon after nine that night to meet Latscha. I went over to see Klein, and he and I decided, without Ria's knowledge, to go to that same café in half an hour to see what Latscha was like. We had never seen her and this was a chance to satisfy our childish curiosity.

Ria sat huddled against the wall and Latscha opposite her. To make our appearance less obvious, I made at first as if I had not seen Ria until Klein had pointed her out to me.

'I didn't know you were here', I said to her, coming up to their table. 'I thought you were in the place down the road. Weren't you supposed to meet there?'

'Hullo, Ria', Klein said. Ria took very little notice of our entrance. She sat there, huddled against the wall. Not one part of her face or body was listless. She had not taken her coat off or her blue woollen gloves, which had a hole in both thumbs. She had kept them on, I knew, because she did not want to show how her hands were trembling. Her hands and her lips, which dried up and looked parched when she was very excited, always gave her away. When she was in this state, her lips were liable to collapse at any moment, there would be terror on her face and then she



would burst out crying uncontrollably. Both Klein and I noticed these details, and we were glad we had come, to ease, we hoped, her tension. Latscha sat there, and smiled at us with her big wet teeth. I remember how awkward this meeting was. We did not know how to sit down.

Eventually, I sat next to Ria, and Klein next to Latscha. It was the wrong way to sit, I knew, because I was hemming Ria in. She could not get out quickly enough in case she wanted to cry, and I knew that if this happened, she would not be able to control herself. For a long moment, we sat there in awkward silence, and then Klein started to talk to Latscha, asking her very quickly all kinds of ordinary things. I soon joined in the conversation and we both tried to give Ria strength by trying to puncture the air of embarrassment, by giving Ria the advantage over Latscha with our presence, because it prevented Latscha from saying anything to Ria which might hurt her.

We only stayed for ten minutes in the Café. Ria then got up very quickly, pushed me aside and we broke up and left. Once outside, but out of sight of the others, she burst out crying. I put my arm round her, but she did not notice, and I walked her home.

'Why cry like that?' I asked her when we entered our house.

'I'm upset. That's all. I'm just upset', she said.

We sat for a while in our kitchen. I thought Klein might have come. I didn't see him again that night. Latscha had taken a taxi. I had heard her hail one, and Klein must have gone to another café. For a long time, Ria sat on one of our hard kitchen chairs. They are hard as the low stools on which the Jews sit when they mourn their dead.

It was not long after this meeting that Aaron fixed his wedding day. I did not see him again, and he kept Latscha away from Klein, so Ria told me, because he was afraid of being talked about. I do not know whether Ria saw much of Aaron any more. He rang, I know, on most

days, and Ria told me about some other room he had where he wanted to meet her every day. I don't know whether she ever went there. Perhaps she did. She loved him enough even for that. But I do not know whether she ever went to him there.

## XXV

Ten days ago, they married. They have gone to Ireland for their honeymoon and no one knows their address. I asked Klein to ask Jack for it the other day, because at one moment I wanted to send Aaron a telegram about Ria. But now I'm glad I didn't. Ria's death has nothing to do with him.

I don't know whether I dreamt of the events of that fatal day before or after they took place. I really have no idea. But I now feel that I knew all along what was going to happen, down to the last detail. I knew that the sleeping pills were in a drawer of Ria's dressing table and that she would wait until about eleven that night before she would take them to drowse herself to death. As soon as I discovered her lying on the bed with all her clothes on, I knew what had happened. There was a lack of surprise in me, a strange and terrible calm. Only when I failed to revive her, when I realised that it was too late, did this calm leave me and the terror start.

I went to the office that day with some hesitation. I was afraid to leave Ria alone, but I overcame that fear because I am used to overcoming fear. Very often I feel I'm going to die that very minute. A slight pain in the region of the heart brings it on and I feel that if I give in at that moment I will surely die. I cast it aside, by quickly changing the subject on my mind, I get up, go to the window to breathe in fresh air, or I box my chest, sometimes very hard, so that I bruise afterwards, to create a new area of pain on which to concentrate. Everyone has experienced this fear and everyone has different ways of overcoming it. Sometimes it is quite slight and lasts only for a second or two. At other times, especially at night, it is worse. I do not trust myself to sleep then, and twist and turn; my

limbs become heavy with fatigue but I go on resisting sleep as long as I can. Next day I feel the aftermath of excitement and agitation, I feel restless and silent.

How can I have gone out that day and left Ria alone when I was afraid of what she might do to herself? Why did I not trust my senses? Why was I puerile with my sensibility? Why did I discount the danger of that day? I am a pig which cares only for its stomach. One cannot trust human beings. If I admit this, then my past is ruined. I will not give in like that. I do not want to avoid guilt. I don't care any more what anyone says about me. But I will never agree with the idiot of a coroner whom I had to face the other day who put down Ria's death 'to the balance of her mind being disturbed'. What does he know other than the absurd formulae of law into which he puts every case which comes before him, like a clerk putting his figures into the right column of his ledger?

Have you been awake the night before some wretched murderer is due to hang? You follow his last hours. You let your mind worm itself into his thoughts the last time he eats, you take a guess at what he is thinking about that night and what he must feel like the next day when he awakes to a fear which will not leave him to the end. And you think of the hangman, that clerk of death, who handles the tools of death, soaps the rope and ties the noose and oils the trapdoor onto which they lead the helpless prisoner.

I followed Aaron's wedding as I follow the barbarity of hanging. That night before the wedding, I lay awake in our bed to think his thoughts. For a time, Ria lay weeping beside me, and I remember that suddenly her tears stopped and she was quite calm and still. She had fallen asleep. I remembered having read somewhere that those condemned to death are said to sleep heavily, but I did not see Ria as the condemned one. I thought of the night before my own wedding and I remembered that I had no thoughts at all in my head. I wondered whether Aaron was thinking

of Ria. Tomorrow he was putting the seal on his break with her, so that she was no more a threat to his independence. As he was so near to being free of her, he must have thought of her. For if he had truly mourned E. he must have been familiar with nostalgia. Or had he killed his love for Ria, so that she would at last become equal to his first bride who had died five years ago? Why was I blind to the consequence of this terrible thought? Why did I not recognize that my thoughts were a tiger which was real enough to tear her life to pieces?

I think only Jack went to the registry office to witness Aaron's marriage. I was not afraid of the wedding hour: Until the last moment before an execution there is still hope for a reprieve which some messenger, speeding to the prison, will bring in time to stop the condemned man's death. It is afterwards that I feel bad. It is afterwards that I feel the true revulsion against the outrage that has been committed.

What I felt that long day as anger and outrage, was agony for Ria. To think of Aaron kissing Latscha, of driving off to Ireland, of being carefree, of being finally divorced from Ria, this drove her into silence and despair. It drove her to taking those pills. And I curse Aaron for it. I shall forever curse him for this, whether I shall kill him or not. I shall get at him easily, there is no difficulty in that, nor in killing him. He is very weak and I can do it with my bare hands. He should have known what he was doing to Ria, he should have been aware of her strength and her pride which made her take her life. I'm not interested in his right to throw her over for someone else. Of course he had that right. But equally he had no right to let Ria kill herself. For she fought for him and she loved him to the end. Perhaps she loved me too, but that doesn't really matter any more. Not to give in to defeat, even if this costs you your life, that is true heroism. He should have known all along that she was capable of being a heroine. And even if he never thought of it, he is respon-

sible. For I have learnt that even if we do not understand one another, we are still responsible to one another. I have no doubt about this.

When I came home from the office at about seven o'clock that night, I found the house terribly quiet. I let myself into the front door and I was astonished and frightened by the silence. The children's coats and Ria's were hanging on the rack, but all the doors were shut and there was no noise from anywhere. I found Mariella in the kitchen playing a quiet game with the children. Ria, they said, was upstairs. She was lying on our bed in the dark. I saw her eyes staring into the dark and she did not move when she acknowledged my arrival. I put on the light. There was an ash-tray next to her full of stubs, some of which had spilt onto the bed cover. She said she was alright, and soon afterwards she came down to prepare supper, whilst Mariella put the children to bed. As Ria seemed quite calm, I did not mention Aaron at all. An atmosphere of mourning pervaded the house. The children must have sensed it. For once, I wished them to scream and shout to fill the vacant air. But they went off quietly after supper and they must soon have fallen asleep. As a rule, they delay lights out, by calling one of us as often as they can think of something else to ask for. That night they did not once call. Ria was tired and followed them up soon after eight.

I do not think had I stayed home that night that this would have prevented Ria from killing herself. My fears for her had subsided, and I went out to meet Klein in a café. I sometimes stay out very late at night, often until one or two o'clock, talking to Klein and other people I meet. That night, I didn't want to be home late. Often Ria stays awake until I come back and keeps the light on. When I returned at eleven, I found her in the bedroom, lying on the bed, with all her clothes on. I had put the light on, the bedside lamp by my side, and I had kicked against a small hard object on the floor, so that I was

afraid I might have woken her with the noise. When I saw her I knew what I had kicked. I saw the little bottle by the side of my foot, and I took Ria off the bed. I gripped her round the waist and held her upside down. I thought the poison would drop out of her, but I was too late.

This was ten days ago. The only time I've been out of the house since then was when I went to the funeral. The only people I've seen since the funeral are Mariella, and Klein who has come along once or twice. He is speechless when he comes. He understands what has happened and he is speechless.

In a moment I will be at the end of what I had to say, and I know that the moment I put down my pen a rage will rise within me. I have drunk the wine of my life and now I feel a ravenous thirst. Aaron is the cause of Ria's death, but her death will have no meaning for him and he will not blame himself for it. Had he been a brother to me we could have mourned for her together. But I do not want to lament in front of him. I don't want to hear what he thought about Ria, and what he knew of her. It would be like talking to a whore about love.

I've taken the little bottle with the screw-top out of my pocket. I shall throw it away, after taking out the last three pills which I'll throw down the sink. I'll return the key of Ria's wardrobe into its lock. I'll have the children home in three or four days. I'll think of some way of breaking the news to them gently. I'll do all this because I feel these are the right things to do. I feel an emptiness inside me, thirst, hunger and loss. I cannot fill this emptiness with Aaron's death. He has nothing to do with it. He's gone away. He has nothing more to do with us.